

Dickens by Numbers: the Christmas Numbers of *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the short fiction that makes up the annual Christmas Numbers of Dickens's journals, *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*. Through close reading and with reference to Dickens's letters, contemporary reviews, and the work of his contributors, this thesis contends that the Christmas Numbers are one of the most remarkable and overlooked bodies of work of the second half of the nineteenth century. Dickens's short fictions rarely receive sustained or close attention, despite the continuing commitment by critics to bring the whole range of Dickens's career into focus, from his sketches and journalism, to his late public readings. Through readings of selected texts, this thesis will show that Dickens's Christmas Number stories are particularly powerful and experimental examples of some of the deepest and most recurrent concerns of his work. They include, for example, three of his four uses of a child narrator and one of his few female narrators, and are concerned with childhood, memory, and the socially marginal figures and distinctive voices that are so characteristic of his longer work. But, crucially, they also go further than his longer work to thematise the very questions raised by their production, including anonymity, authorship, collaboration, and annual return. This thesis takes Dickens's works as its primary focus, but it will also draw throughout on the work of his contributors, which appeared alongside Dickens's stories in these Christmas issues. In doing so this thesis aims to acknowledge the original conditions under which these stories were produced and published, but more importantly to underline the rich plurality of the Victorian periodical, which these Numbers demonstrate.

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## Author's Declaration

The material presented here has not appeared in publication or previously been submitted for examination for a degree at this or any other university, and is the sole work of the author.

## Preface

This preface offers a brief description of the Extra Christmas Numbers as they were originally published, as an introduction to the primary texts of this thesis, and to complement the information provided in the appendix.<sup>1</sup>

Produced between 1850 and 1867, the Christmas Numbers of Dickens's journals, *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, were "Extra" issues, published in addition to the regular weekly numbers, on various dates between 1 and 21 December.<sup>2</sup> Extremely popular with their first audiences, reaching sales of almost 300,000 at their peak, the Christmas Number initially covered 24 pages in double columns, which increased to 36 pages in 1852, and again to 48 pages when Dickens replaced *Household Words* with *All the Year Round* in 1859.<sup>3</sup>

Each Number was split into parts, usually between 6 and 10, which were written by Dickens and other authors, or sometimes by Dickens and Wilkie Collins in collaboration. These parts, which were published anonymously and without illustrations, usually included a narrative frame written by Dickens, which set up a scenario into which the contributed material could be

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<sup>1</sup> Please see the abbreviations page for more detailed information about the primary sources used.

<sup>2</sup> See appendix for individual publication dates. On the relation of the "Extra" issue to regular numbers, see footnote (7) on page 9.

<sup>3</sup> On sales, see John M. L. Drew, *Dickens the Journalist* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 147–48; on the length of the Numbers, see Charles Dickens, *The Christmas Stories*, ed. Ruth Glancy (London: J. M. Dent, 1996), xxxvii.

introduced.<sup>4</sup> Dickens would write to potential contributors in advance with instructions about the basic overall theme and style of the framing story, so that they could develop their stories in keeping with his scheme for the Number.<sup>5</sup>

As is evidenced by footnotes here and throughout, Ruth Glancy and others have done much of the crucial information gathering about the Christmas Numbers already. Glancy's annotated bibliography, *Dickens's Christmas Books, Christmas Stories, and Other Short Fiction* is a valuable resource to anyone studying this material, with information on each Number relating to, for example, Dickens's letters, contemporary reviews, critical studies, adaptations, and subsequent editions.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See appendix for a detailed break down of each Number.

<sup>5</sup> See Dickens, *The Christmas Stories*. Glancy includes details of Dickens's instructions to contributors in many of her introductions to the individual Numbers throughout this edition.

<sup>6</sup> Ruth F. Glancy, *Dickens's Christmas Books, Christmas Stories, and Other Short Fiction: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc, 1985).



## Introduction

To read the “Extra” Christmas Numbers of Charles Dickens’s *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, is at once to recognise the astonishingly rich world of the Victorian periodical, and the particular power of Dickens’s voice that set him apart in this noisy and burgeoning literary marketplace.<sup>7</sup> The Christmas Numbers, which Dickens produced in collaboration with other authors over eighteen years, form a miscellaneous trove of stories. From a dwarf who wins the lottery, to a man whose life is ruined by the ague; from babies switched at birth, to cannibalism aboard a stranded lifeboat; the variety signifies a readership that was accustomed to diversity and the broad pool of authors that Dickens had to call upon – from famous names in journalism and literature, to those who were relatively unknown and have since been forgotten by history. The short form allowed authors to explore a broad range of subjects, including isolation, disability, violence, sexuality, dysfunctional families, chance encounters, and strange mental states, including dreams, premonitions, and delirium. The endings of these stories are often ambivalent, unresolved, or tragic.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The Christmas Number became an “Extra” Number after its initial success in 1850, after which it was published in addition to the regular issue. See Ruth F. Glancy, “Dickens and Christmas: His Framed-Tale Themes,” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 35, no. 1 (1980): 59. For sake of ease, I will be referring to them all as the Christmas Numbers throughout.

<sup>8</sup> This is looked at in more detail in the conclusion.

These single editions commanded the highest sales of Dickens's journals and, according to John Forster, of his career.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, the cultural dominance of the novel, and the now unusual publication format, means that they rarely receive sustained attention, and are more often subsumed into discussions of Dickens's longer work, relegated to footnote status, or not mentioned at all.<sup>10</sup> This thesis takes as its starting point that there is a great deal to be gained for the study of Dickens and Victorian periodical fiction in examining the Christmas Numbers. Dickens's stories for the Numbers have aspects in common with his longer work, for example, an interest in distinctive performative voices, in socially marginal people and work, and in childhood. But they are also exceptional in the context of his career, as they contain some of his most forceful moments of self-reflection, personal allusion, and experimentation. Taken as a whole, this publication – heterogeneous, multi-authored, and ongoing – challenges some of the standard procedures of literary criticism. Indeed, the stories themselves often thematise the conceptual questions that are raised by their production, about authorship, collaboration, anonymity, ownership, autobiographical storytelling, and annual return, which will be dealt with in individual chapters. This introduction, in the meantime, will introduce the Christmas Number and the principal methodological challenges it poses.

Editing and contributing to the Christmas Number each year took up a great deal of Dickens's time and energy. As his narrator for the "Barbox

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<sup>9</sup> John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1873), 3:218; see also Drew, *Dickens the Journalist*, 147–48.

<sup>10</sup> See Deborah A. Thomas, *Dickens and the Short Story* (London: Batsford Academic and Educational Ltd, 1982), 1.

Brothers” stories in *Mugby Junction* (1866) suggests, the collected stories, which he is supposed to have assembled,

occupied a much longer time in the getting together than they ever will in the perusal. And this is probably the case with most reading matter, except when it is of that highly beneficial kind (for Posterity) which is “thrown off in a few moments of leisure” by the superior poetic geniuses who scorn to take prose pains. (10)<sup>11</sup>

This passage dryly reconstructs the view of detractors who saw periodical literature as ephemeral filler, timely rather than timeless, which was produced by the supposedly “inferior” minds of professional authors, whose “prose pains” set them at odds with the fleeting moments of inspiration experienced by the Romantic “poetic geniuses,” who were posthumously celebrated.<sup>12</sup> Dickens’s wry allusion pre-empted the comments of some of his critics that year. One reviewer of *Mugby Junction* bemoaned the “absurdity” of seasonal literature that was “read and forgotten” before Christmas day.<sup>13</sup> Another compared the quality of the stories to “the last rinsings of a tea pot,” a phrase which recalls a scathing review of one of William Makepeace Thackeray’s Christmas books, which denounced all Christmas literature as like “the rinsings of a void brain after the

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<sup>11</sup> For brief discussions of Doctor Marigold’s description of compiling the Number, see Glancy’s introduction to Dickens, *The Christmas Stories*, xxix; and Thomas, *Dickens and the Short Story*, 102.

<sup>12</sup> See Florian Schweizer, “Authorship and the Professional Writer,” in *Charles Dickens in Context*, ed. Sally Ledger and Holly Furneaux (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 118–9.

<sup>13</sup> “London Correspondence,” *Trewman’s Exeter Flying Post or Plymouth and Cornish Advertiser*, December 12, 1866. n.b. contemporary newspapers were accessed via *19<sup>th</sup> Century British Library Newspapers* online; full references are given in the bibliography.

more important concoctions of the expired year.”<sup>14</sup> A negative view of Dickens’s short work persisted for some time. In his study of the Victorian short story, Harold Orel suggested that Dickens had “carried over from the eighteenth century a concept of the short story as a marketable commodity that filled space in magazines and newspapers.”<sup>15</sup> Of course Dickens was well aware of the marketability of the Christmas publication. Indeed, Dickens’s story for *Somebody’s Luggage* (explored in chapter 1) wonders what kind of “commodity” the Christmas Number is, and the kinds of “prose pains” that might be suffered by a Christmas Number contributor. Nevertheless, the energy he invested in the Christmas Number, and the ways that the stories both restage and go beyond the material we find in his longer celebrated work, imply that they were far more to him than seasonal filler.

Dickens wrote frequently about the torment of producing the Christmas Number, as chapter 1 will show. In August of 1866, Dickens wrote to his sub-editor William Wills, informing him that the Christmas Number “continue[d] to reside in the Limbo of the Unborn.”<sup>16</sup> By October, he was able to lament the fact that he was in “Christmas Labour” while his friend and contributor to the periodical Wilkie Collins was “cruising about the world, a compound of Hayward

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<sup>14</sup> “Gleanings,” *Royal Cornwall Gazette, Falmouth Packet, and General Advertiser*, January 3, 1867. Thackeray quoted the review in his preface to the second edition of “The Kickleburys on the Rhine”; see Thackeray, *The Christmas Books of Mr M. A. Titmarsh*, vol. 14 of *The Works of William Makepeace Thackeray* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1911), 179.

<sup>15</sup> Harold Orel, *The Victorian Short Story: Development and Triumph of a Literary Genre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 56.

<sup>16</sup> Pilgrim, 11:233.

and Captain Cook!"<sup>17</sup> However jokingly, the phrase suggests that by 1866 Dickens associated this Christmas work with a sense of ineluctable familial responsibility that the younger writer was free from. If he did feel a sense of responsibility or begrudging duty, then he effectively rewrote it in the Numbers themselves, in his characters that heroically or admirably take responsibility for others. Dickens and Collins's collaborative works *The Wreck of the Golden Mary* (1856) and *The Perils of Certain English Prisoners* (1857), describe the actions of heroic sailors whose ships have been wrecked or hijacked, and Dickens's stories for *A House to Let* (1858), the *Lirriper* stories (1863-4), *Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions* (1865), and "His Boots" from *Somebody's Luggage* (1862), all involve adoption. Dickens may have seen the Christmas Number as a particularly difficult kind of literary "Labour," but it is also the place where he began to experiment with the child narrator, which is explored in chapter 2.

The Christmas Numbers were collaborative works. Contributions by a handful of authors were contained within, or on a few occasions introduced by, a framing narrative by Dickens. Dickens wrote several of these framing narratives with Wilkie Collins, but in the majority of cases, he circulated a theme to potential contributors beforehand.<sup>18</sup> Any single Number could be a case study in the variety of Victorian authorship. There are names that are familiar within and, to an extent, outside of Victorianist scholarship, in particular Elizabeth Gaskell and Wilkie Collins, but also George A. Sala and Harriet Martineau. There are other less familiar names, which have nevertheless attracted some critical

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<sup>17</sup> Pilgrim, 11:251.

<sup>18</sup> Glancy, "Dickens and Christmas," 58.

attention, including Edmund Yates, Adelaide Anne Procter, Hesba Stretton (the pseudonym of Sarah Smith), and Eliza Lynn. Then there are names which are barely, if ever, heard today: Eliza Griffiths, Harriet Parr, and Charles Collins, the younger brother of Wilkie Collins.<sup>19</sup> Male, female, wealthy, bohemian, famous, and unknown: this miscellaneous group, who might never be found together in a room, appeared side by side, anonymously, in the pages of the Christmas Numbers. Indeed, Dickens associated the variety of the Number with the heterogeneity of the population of the city itself in the *Lirriper* stories (the focus of chapter 3), where he imagines that the landlady and lodgers of a London lodging-house have contributed the stories.

For the first two Numbers (1850 and 1851) the main genre of the contributions was that of the periodical essay, which focused on how Christmas was celebrated across Britain and the empire. Thereafter, the emphasis shifted away from these essayistic accounts of the holiday tradition, and towards original fiction. There are sentimental poems, ghost stories, and colonial tales or stories of adventure, but the shocks and plot twists of melodrama are the predominant mode of the contributed material by authors other than Dickens. Across the Christmas Numbers, there are twenty-six erotic triangles, ten murders, one death on the battlefield and several during a pirate hijack, three cases of manslaughter, five attempted murders, two hangings, two individual suicides and one group suicide, two cases of unintentional bigamy, one harem, one spell gone horribly wrong, one group kidnapping, one abduction, and two

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<sup>19</sup> Some of the now lesser known Christmas Number contributors also published serials in Dickens's journals, including George Sala, Amelia B. Edwards, Henry Spicer, Edmund Yates, and Rosa Mulholland. See Drew, *Dickens the Journalist*, 145.

forced marriages. And you can't count on a happy ending either: of the thirty-seven stories about or including a marriage, less than half end well for the couple. Seemingly the age that gave us the lasting image of seasonal mirth also recognised that the time of year was also one for contemplating domestic strife.

The Christmas Numbers contain Dickens's most extended experiment with the first-person narrator. The stories, particularly by Dickens's later first-person narrators, Christopher, Emma Lirriper, Doctor Marigold, and the Boy at Mugby, carry the charge of the past, as the characters tell us their histories; but they are also rooted in the moment, in the aural experience, in the quality and texture of the narrator's voice, as we read or hear it. These two positions, the sensory and reflective, evoke the Christmas experience itself: between the vibrant colours, enticing smells, new toys pressed between fingertips, sharp contrasts of biting frost and sleep-inducing warmth, and the cerebral elements of reflection, contemplativeness, memory, and prayer. But they also perhaps relate to the temporality of the periodical itself, as the immanence of the narrator's voice, which encapsulates the momentariness of the periodical press, is counterbalanced by the weight of personal history and the desire for narrative that this history represents.<sup>20</sup> Chapter 4, which focuses on *Mugby Junction*, will look at the way the temporality of annual publishing was absorbed into some of the stories themselves.

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<sup>20</sup> Sue Zemka explores the relation between the momentary encounter and narrative pacing in "Dickens's Peripatetic Novels," in *Time and the Moment in Victorian Literature and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 102-21.

The great range of work that makes up the study of Dickens contains a strong movement to bring the whole of Dickens's writing and career under the same scrutiny as his novels, particularly the later ones. John Bowen's *Other Dickens: Pickwick to Chuzzlewit* (2009) aims to redress this lack of parity in favour of the late work, often seen as both more interesting and more accomplished, by exploring in sequence the exuberance and strangeness of Dickens's earliest novels. Two recent studies, Robert Douglas-Fairhurst's biography *Becoming Dickens: The Invention of a Novelist* (2011) and Robert L. Patten's *Charles Dickens and "Boz": The Birth of the Industrial-Age Author* (2012) examine the early decades of Dickens's development as a writer, and the historical conditions and personal decisions that defined his early career. John Drew's exploration of Dickens's journalism in *Dickens the Journalist* (2003), demonstrates not only the richness of Dickens's journalistic work throughout his career, but also the ways in which it influenced his prose style. Catherine Waters's *Commodity Culture in Dickens's "Household Words": The Social Life of Goods* (2008), the most focused study of one of Dickens's journals to date, looks at the journal's non-fiction prose in the context of Victorian England's emerging commodity culture. A significant exception to the work on Dickens's life and work during 1830s and 1840s, or on his journals, is Malcolm Andrews's study about Dickens's late career move into public reading. These studies, each in their own way, have added a unique and valuable new viewpoint to our understanding of Dickens as a writer, but an emerging emphasis upon Dickens's early career means that his short fiction continues to be largely excluded.



Within this broadening of critical interest to cover Dickens's full career, two studies have focused on the Christmas Numbers. David Parker's *Christmas and Charles Dickens* (2005) offers a very sensitive reading of "A Christmas Tree" (*ACT*) but the author makes clear that his interest is in Dickens's stories which take Christmas as their subject, and so the majority of Christmas Number stories are excluded.<sup>21</sup> In *Dickens and the Short Story* (1982), Deborah A. Thomas has argued persuasively that the Christmas Numbers demonstrate Dickens's desire to experiment with forms of narration and with collaboration, and his fascination with the idea of authorship as a type of public entertainment and with the notion of imaginative "fancy."<sup>22</sup> Aspects of the critical response to Thomas's book betrayed a lingering doubt about the value of the Christmas Numbers. Jerome H. Buckley remarked that of the stories she examines, "few bear close aesthetic scrutiny."<sup>23</sup> More recently, Lillian Nayder has produced a significant challenge to Buckley's statement in *Unequal Partners: Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, and Victorian Authorship* (2002), which looks at the Numbers that Dickens and Collins jointly authored, which she argues reflect the complicated relationship of literary collaboration between the mature novelist and his younger protégé.<sup>24</sup> Another reviewer of Thomas's book was unconvinced of the necessity of her

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<sup>21</sup> David Parker, *Christmas and Charles Dickens* (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 2005), 222.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas, *Dickens and the Short Story*, 5, 134.

<sup>23</sup> Jerome H. Buckley, review of *Dickens and the Short Story* by Deborah A. Thomas and other critical works, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 38, no. 3 (1983): 336.

<sup>24</sup> Lillian Nayder, *Unequal Partners: Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, and Victorian Authorship* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 27.

study at all, suggesting that “in many instances the short pieces that Thomas discusses are minor works that add little to our appreciation of Dickens’s art.”<sup>25</sup> “Minorness,” of course, is a matter of character as well as genre. Alex Woloch has perceptively argued that “minor characters are at the heart of Dickens’s fictional achievement.”<sup>26</sup> Many of the narrators and characters of the Christmas Numbers – the waiter, spinster, hermit, sailor, working child, street artist, cheap jack, outcast – belong to a group of socially marginal, often eccentric individuals, memorable for their idiosyncratic speech patterns and physical quirks. Not all of Dickens’s Christmas Number narrators follow this pattern: the narrators of *The Seven Poor Travellers* (1854), *The Holly-Tree Inn* (1855), and *The Haunted House* (1859), employ a less conspicuous vocal style to tell their stories. Nevertheless, the “minor” status of these stories, and of many of the characters they portray, is perhaps part of the very reason that they are important to an understanding of Dickens’s art.

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It is especially challenging to attempt to establish a neat critical paradigm for a production like the Christmas Number, something it has in common with the study of nineteenth-century journalism which, with its “heterogeneous and

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<sup>25</sup> Michael Shelden, review of *Dickens and the Short Story* by Deborah A. Thomas and other critical works, *Victorian Studies* 26, no. 4 (1983): 460.

<sup>26</sup> Alex Woloch, *The One Versus the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 126.

multi-vocal form resists the protocols of traditional literary analysis.”<sup>27</sup> Minor writings, Christmas stories, short fiction, sketches, journalism, dramatic monologues, scraps: these are some of the terms that have been used to describe the Christmas Number stories that Dickens produced. Drew refers to the “remarkable fusion of occasional journalism and communal storytelling” found in the Numbers.<sup>28</sup> Walter Allen calls them, rather awkwardly, “brief prose narratives,” because so few of them qualify as short stories “in the modern sense.”<sup>29</sup> Indeed, Thomas had to delineate her use of the term “short story” for the purposes of her study, as merely a tale that is based on oral modes of storytelling.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, this critical problem of how (and perhaps, whether at all) to categorise these stories is anticipated in Dickens’s introduction to a Christmas Number story by Wilkie Collins, in which the narrator is a lawyer who asks his companions to define “a story”: “[y]ou know, but you can’t exactly tell. I thought so!” (19, *SPT*).<sup>31</sup>

Of G. K. Chesterton’s many attempts at finding an adequate description for Dickens’s Christmas Number stories, which include “almost rejected notes,” “the books that he might have written,” and “sketches or parts of sketches,” “scraps” is perhaps the most evocative, for the way it throws off the trouble of resolving

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<sup>27</sup> Catherine Waters, *Commodity Culture in Dickens’s “Household Words”: The Social Life of Goods* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 6; on the ambiguity of genre and the critic’s methodology, see also Drew, *Dickens the Journalist*, 2.

<sup>28</sup> Drew, *Dickens the Journalist*, 156.

<sup>29</sup> Walter Allen, *The Short Story in English* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 12.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas, *Dickens and the Short Story*, 4.

<sup>31</sup> Identified by Glancy as by Dickens in *The Christmas Stories*, 79–80.

exactly which generic term might best encapsulate them, and expresses something instead about the peculiar power and vitality of these short pieces, like the precious “scraps” of a saint’s robe.<sup>32</sup> A scrap of a manuscript, of course, is so much more intriguing for narrative than the full thing, like the message in a bottle, torn, faded, and blurred, that instigates the adventure story of *A Message from the Sea*, the Christmas Number for 1860. The serious point that Chesterton was making was that some of Dickens’s best work is found in these short pieces.<sup>33</sup> Still, faced with navigating the multiple authors and subjects, shifting tones and genres, the student of the Christmas Number may find him or herself in the position of the eponymous protagonist of the “Barbox Brothers” stories in *Mugby Junction*, who was trying to decide which of the junction’s seven railway lines to take. “I may like the look of one Line better than another,” he mused, but as he surveys their complex, intersecting machinery, no path immediately suggests itself: “I have not made my next move much clearer by this. No hurry. No need to make up my mind to-day, or to-morrow, nor yet the day after. I’ll take a walk” (4).

As a production, the Christmas Number straddles several overlapping critical territories, with their own protocols and priorities, including the study of periodicals, journalism, short fiction, and of publishing history. This raises two questions: whether to give preference to a single author or to the plurality of authors; and whether to concentrate on individual texts or whole numbers. For Margaret Beetham, working within the context of periodical studies, the “whole

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<sup>32</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Criticisms and Appreciations of the Works of Charles Dickens* (Thirsk: House of Stratus, 2001), 78.

<sup>33</sup> Chesterton, *Criticisms and Appreciations*, 79.

issue or number” is a better unit of analysis than the individual article, quarried out as a single piece and detached from its original publishing context.<sup>34</sup> In their seminal discussion of the Victorian serial novel, Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund draw on Louis James’s suggestion that a volume of a periodical might even be treated as a “single text by a corporate author.”<sup>35</sup> Thomas, working in a literary tradition, excludes the work of Dickens’s contributors altogether, although she emphasises the importance for modern critics of an awareness of the original publication format.<sup>36</sup> Ruth Glancy’s Everyman edition of the Christmas Stories (1996) excludes the work of contributors, but outlines in each case the full contents and structure of the Number as it was published originally; and more recently, Hesperus Press have released individual Christmas Numbers with the work of the contributors included.<sup>37</sup>

Drew has suggested that reading Dickens against the backdrop of the Victorian periodical or newspaper is, “without robbing his work of its creative

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<sup>34</sup> Margaret Beetham, “Towards a Theory of the Periodical as a Publishing Genre,” in *Investigating Victorian Journalism*, ed. Laurel Brake, Aled Jones, and Lionel Madden (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1990), 20. See also Lyn Pykett, “Reading the Victorian Periodical Press: Text and Context,” *Victorian Periodicals Review* 22, no. 3 (1989): 100-108.

<sup>35</sup> Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund, *The Victorian Serial* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991), 9.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas, *Dickens and the Short Story*, see for example, 103.

<sup>37</sup> One of the regular editors of these editions, Melisa Klimaszewski, makes a strong case for considering the Number as a whole production, in “Rebuilding Charles Dickens’s *Wreck* and Rethinking the Collaborative,” *SEL* 54, no. 2 (2014): 815-33.

individualism, to read him as a particularly intense expression of its force.”<sup>38</sup> From the beginning, this thesis has sought a way to write about the Christmas Numbers that highlights the unique interest of Dickens’s texts, but that also accounts for the Number as a heterogeneous, multi-voiced, multi-authored production. Although I have aimed to incorporate as many different voices as possible, I have not set out to be exhaustive. I have moved away from the developmental model used by Thomas in *Dickens and the Short Story*, and have instead focused on several of Dickens’s contributions which have a theme or focus that is variously reflected and refracted in stories by other contributors; or certain “clusters of thought and feeling,” to borrow Rosemarie Bodenheimer’s phrase from her excellent study *Knowing Dickens*.<sup>39</sup> I draw attention to the ways in which stories emphasise their own materiality (in chapter 1), and where they thematise the datedness of the periodical number (chapter 4), but the organisation of chapters aims to explicate the conflicts and correspondences between the material as a whole, rather than remain faithful to the way it was originally published. This challenge of combining the dual tasks of accounting for a chronically undervalued and under-researched area of Dickens’s work, and the rich miscellany of Victorian periodical fiction, reflects in some sense Dickens’s own editorial challenge, in which he had to negotiate his desire for thematic coherence and unity, against the unique force, originality, and interest of individual stories.

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<sup>38</sup> John Drew, “The Newspaper and Periodical Market,” in *Charles Dickens in Context*, ed. Sally Ledger and Holly Furneaux (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 112.

<sup>39</sup> Rosemarie Bodenheimer, *Knowing Dickens* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 2.

My method for cataloguing the Christmas Numbers during research has been converted into a table (see appendix) which includes the details of all the stories, by Dickens and by others, that have not been described in this thesis, but have been a part of the process and informed the work, even by their exclusion. This study has been made possible by the research and bibliographic work of others, and their discerning recognition of the value of these short pieces. Glancy's edition of the Christmas Stories introduced me to Dickens's Christmas Numbers, or as she describes them, to Dickens at his most "personal, introspective . . . sincere" and "comic", but it also contains valuable information about the publishing history of the stories, the surviving manuscripts, the illustrations printed in subsequent editions, and a useful introduction to each Number.<sup>40</sup> The *Dickens Journals Online* project, which received its official launch in the first year of my study, has made both *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* available online, without subscription, in their entirety. This significant undertaking reinforces the value of these journals, in the context of Dickens's career and the wider field of Victorian studies. I have chosen to use the facsimile versions of the Numbers provided by *Dickens Journals Online* as my primary source material, because it reflects honestly the way that my research has been undertaken, and because of the great benefit that I see high quality online resources as providing to both researchers and others who are fascinated by Dickens's journals.

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<sup>40</sup> Glancy, introduction to *The Christmas Stories*, xxxiii.

## Chapter 1 – The Waiter and the Writer: *Somebody's Luggage* (1862)

*Somebody's Luggage* was, in Dickens's words, "a comic defiance of the difficulty of a Xmas No. with an unexpected end to it."<sup>1</sup> It is his most direct fictional portrayal of the literary industry he was working in, a humorous, cruel, light-hearted account of how stories might be produced, modified, assessed, edited, and presented eventually as a Christmas Number.<sup>2</sup> It is exceptional for at least two more reasons. Firstly, for being one of only two stories in the entire Christmas Number corpus, by anyone, that concerns a writer (the other being Charles Collins's story for *Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions*, "To Be Taken at the Dinner-Table"). Secondly, it is exceptional for the fact that Dickens includes himself, Charles Dickens the editor, in the story. The narrator of Dickens's framing story is Christopher, Head Waiter at a London coffee-room, who discovers a collection of manuscripts stuffed into some luggage which had been abandoned years earlier in one of their rooms.<sup>3</sup> With Christmas approaching, and his family "down in the world" (46), Christopher pawns the luggage and sells the stories to *All the Year Round*. Only afterwards does Christopher realise that the real author might come across his work in print, and seek him out to demand reparation. The story draws on both the possibility of inadvertently exposing

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<sup>1</sup> Pilgrim, 10:129.

<sup>2</sup> A number of critics have commented upon the explicitly self-reflexive aspects of the Number. See for example the introduction to *Somebody's Luggage*, ed. Melisa Klimaszewski and Melissa Valiska Gregory (London: Hesperus, 2006), xii–xiii; and Thomas's discussion in *Dickens and the Short Story*, 96–97, 99–101.

<sup>3</sup> The opening and closing parts are entitled "His Leaving it Till Called For," and "His Wonderful End."



oneself through the process of being published, and the act of telling one's own life story, through Christopher's hyperbolic account of himself as a working child. Biography, sketch, and melodrama combine in this story of a waiter-turned-writer.

Like the landlady or the boots, or the countless other economically marginal figures that loom so large in Dickens's account of Victorian, particularly urban, experience, waiters appear throughout his work: from the waiter who polishes off David Copperfield's ale by persuading him that it might poison him, to the "flying" and "immoveable" waiters in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*; the former of whom dashes around while the latter looks on with haughty composure.<sup>4</sup> Christopher provides an explanation for the stark contrast of the flying and immoveable when he states that "[a] Head Waiter must be either Head or Tail. He must be at one extremity or the other of the social scale. He cannot be at the waist of it, or anywhere else but the extremities. It is for him to decide which of the extremities" (4). Being a waiter, then, is a matter of inheritance, as we will see, but it is equally a matter of performance, an "art of behaviour" as it was described in the popular contemporary sketch series, *Heads of the People; or, Portraits of the English*.<sup>5</sup> This was perhaps the kind of performance of solemn gentility or fawning deference that Dickens's own paternal grandparents may

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<sup>4</sup> Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, ed. Jeremy Tambling (London: Penguin, 2014), 78; Charles Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, ed. David Paroissien (London: Penguin, 2002), 118.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Prendergast, "The Waiter," in *Heads of the People: Or, Portraits of the English* (London: Robert Tyas, 1841), 222; on this collection, see also Martina Lauster, *Sketches of the Nineteenth-Century: European Journalism and its Physiologies, 1830-50* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), for example, 268-73.

have undertaken as domestic servants to the aristocratic Crewe family.<sup>6</sup> Just as Christopher's father was a "distant Waiter" (1), connected to the profession by blood, like a distant cousin, so too, perhaps, we can see Dickens as a "distant" butler; keenly attuned to the ways in which identity can be performed like one of the roles in the many plays in which he took part. In his study on voice in Victorian fiction Ivan Kreilkamp suggests that Dickens's work was "thoroughly embedded in modes of vocal performance," more so than any other major Victorian author.<sup>7</sup> Christopher's narrative, like all of Dickens's first-person narrators of the Christmas Numbers – from the early stories shared round the fire, to the Boy at Mugby's irrepressible laughter – has an aura of performance, and the qualities of the spoken word ring out through the narrative. Christopher refers to "the Bard of A. 1." (4), presumably meaning the Bard of Avon, which calls up the theatrical, as does his apostrophic aside "(O Conscience, what a Adder art thou!)" (46). As so often in Dickens's work, the ideas of performance and interiority are not mutually exclusive, as one review suggests: "[t]he Head-waiter's Autobiography is as irresistible as anything Mr Dickens has ever written. It is not a mere photograph of the man's outside aspect; it is a waiter's mind turned inside out."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Peter Ackroyd, *Dickens* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1990), 4–5. On the performance of social identity, see Malcolm Andrews, *Charles Dickens and His Performing Selves: Dickens and the Public Readings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 105–7.

<sup>7</sup> Ivan Kreilkamp, *Voice and the Victorian Storyteller* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 89.

<sup>8</sup> "Literature," *Daily News*, December 6, 1862.

As a rare reflection by Dickens on the figure of the author and the kinds of personal secrets that publication might reveal, and as a comic portrayal of the ways that literature was produced, bought, and sold, this playful and self-reflexive account of the waiter holds a deep significance for both the study of Dickens and of the Victorian periodical more broadly.

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Somebody, the unnamed owner (we never find out his name) of the luggage, is a comic portrait of a shabby-genteel struggling author, a figure like some of the contributors to Dickens's journal no doubt, with his "new-fangled uncollapsible [bag]" and his hair falling over his eyes in a "dusty fluff" (46). Dickens's dealings on the committee of the Royal Literary Fund, which gave grants to struggling writers, which he tried and failed to reform; his role in co-founding the Guild of Literature and Art, which awarded pensions to professional authors; his energy for organising benefits for the bereft families of author friends; and his friendships with bohemian authors such as George A. Sala (the "king" of literary Bohemia by the 1860s)<sup>9</sup> and Edmund Yates, both Christmas Number contributors, demonstrates that he took a sincere interest in, and was keenly aware of, the precariousness of writing for a living for the majority of authors,

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<sup>9</sup> P. D. Edwards, *Dickens's "Young Men": George Augustus Sala, Edmund Yates and the World of Victorian Journalism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997), 19.

long after his own success was established.<sup>10</sup> In his recent biography of Dickens, Douglas-Fairhurst suggests that the fact that he nominally kept open the possibility of a career in law (by keeping hold of his room in chambers), suggests his deep appreciation of just how unpredictable authorship could be.<sup>11</sup>

Dickens came of age as an author during a period in which the notion of what an author was, and what control he or she ought to assume in relation to printers and publishers and, ultimately, his or her own work, was under dispute.<sup>12</sup> With this story, then, Dickens seems to peer both down the chain of command, but also perhaps backwards towards his own early career; a time when, according to Patten, he was “still poor, poorly educated, ambitious, and on the lookout for opportunities.”<sup>13</sup> Christopher’s story can be read partly as a satire on two different models of authorship: between Somebody, the idealist, who from “boyhood’s hour” has “unremittingly and unavailingly endeavoured to get into print” (48), like the great Romantic figures who didn’t need to write for money, and Christopher, the working-class materialist, who pursues it, off-the-cuff, for economic purposes:

Give up the money to be off the bargain and prevent the publication, I could not. My family was down in the world, Christmas was coming on, a brother in the hospital and a sister in the rheumatics could not

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<sup>10</sup> See Nigel Cross, “Literature and Charity: The Royal Literary Fund from David Williams to Charles Dickens,” in *The Common Writer: Life in Nineteenth-Century Grub Street* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 8–37.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, *Becoming Dickens: The Invention of a Novelist* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard, Belknap, 2013), 68.

<sup>12</sup> Robert L. Patten, *Charles Dickens and “Boz”: The Birth of the Industrial-Age Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 16.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

be entirely neglected. And it was not only ins in the family that had told on the resources of one unaided Waitering; outs were not wanting. A brother out of a situation, and another brother out of money to meet an acceptance, and another brother out of his mind, and another brother out at New York . . . had really and truly brought me to a stand till I could turn myself round. (46)

Dickens's own troublesome family aside, the dual motives of financial opportunism and a more traditional picture of authorial compulsion are here neatly divided between Christopher and Somebody, where they were perhaps more subtly entwined in Dickens himself.<sup>14</sup> Writing for money was, necessarily, part of the principle of the professionalisation of authorship, in which Dickens firmly believed;<sup>15</sup> but there was also clearly more at stake for Dickens, who could have followed other careers. In an oft-quoted 1847 letter to Forster, in which Dickens wonders whether to postpone writing a Christmas Book that year in order to concentrate on *Dombey and Son*, he declares he is "loath to lose the money," and yet "more so to leave any gap at Christmas firesides which I ought to fill."<sup>16</sup> Within the context of the public "Dignity of Literature" debate, which was catalysed by Thackeray's satire of the hack writer in *Pendennis*, Richard Salmon has argued that Dickens's notion of professional dignity was poised between his belief in the special status of authorship, and his recognition of it as

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<sup>14</sup> However, it is worth noting Drew's comment that the relatively small profit did not reflect the effort it took to produce the Number, in *Dickens the Journalist*, 156.

<sup>15</sup> Robert L. Patten, *Charles Dickens and His Publishers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 10.

<sup>16</sup> Pilgrim, 5:165. Catherine Waters points out that Dickens's primary motives for writing *A Christmas Carol* were financial in *Dickens and the Politics of the Family* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 72.

another form of wage-labour.<sup>17</sup> Dickens did not openly weigh in on the authorship debate provoked by *Pendennis*; however, his portrayal of Somebody and Christopher, author by calling and author by chance, one writing for love and the other for money, who nevertheless collaborate on the final product, gently satirises the issues at stake.

That Somebody declares Christopher to be his benefactor and a philanthropist (47) may be a joking allusion to Dickens's own role in this capacity, or to an out-dated mode of literary patronage, which Dickens and his allies in the authorship debate saw as demeaning.<sup>18</sup> But there is also a joke about the class of the two men at play, whereby Christopher, a waiter, has become benefactor to a man whom he serves and addresses as "sir" (46). Christopher, unlike Somebody, transforms into a writer overnight, perhaps like other Victorian working class authors who, as Nigel Cross points out, undertook the work on a casual, part-time basis, alongside other jobs, and could be "shoemaking one moment and versemaking the next."<sup>19</sup> The character Lamps from Dickens's "Barbox Brothers" stories in *Mugby Junction* is another part-time writer of sorts, working primarily as a lamplighter at the junction, and composing comic songs on the side. Dickens himself was never dedicated wholly to one type or genre of writing, and from the perspective of his early career, Patten has argued, had no clear long-term plan to be a writer of one kind or

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<sup>17</sup> Richard Salmon, *The Formation of the Victorian Literary Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 103.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>19</sup> Cross, *The Common Writer*, 133.

another.<sup>20</sup> In 1862, he was gently satirising both the notions of authorship as an all-encompassing calling (for those who could afford it), and the idea that just about anybody might decide to take up the pen. According to Christopher, being a waiter is something that you are born to: “you cannot lay down the tailoring, or the shoemaking, or the brokering, or the green-grocering, or the pictorial periodicaling . . . at your will and pleasure by the half-day or evening, and take up Waitering. You may suppose you can, but you cannot . . . You must be bred to it. You must be born to it” (1). So, whilst you might go from waitering to writing, as Christopher does, you may not do the reverse, unless, of course, you have the correct “breeding.”

From ink stains on the carpet to copious amounts of writing and blotting paper, Christopher’s story emphasises the material requirements of authorship, including the considerable liquid requirements, which are in evidence on Somebody’s bill:

#### Coffee Room

1856.	No. 4.		
February 2nd.	Pen and paper .....	£ 0	0 6
	Port Negus .....	0	2 0
	Ditto .....	0	2 0
	Pen and paper .....	0	0 6
	Tumbler broken .....	0	2 6
	Brandy .....	0	2 0
	Pen and paper .....	0	0 6
	Anchovy toast .....	0	2 6
	Pen and paper .....	0	0 6
	Bed .....	0	3 0
February 3rd.	Pen and paper .....	0	0 6
	Breakfast .....	0	2 6
	“ Broiled ham .....	0	2 0
	“ Eggs .....	0	1 0
	“ Watercresses .....	0	1 0

<sup>20</sup> Patten, *Charles Dickens and “Boz”*, 111.

“ Shrimps .....	0	1	0
Carried forward .....	£ 1	4	0
Brought forward .....	£ 1	4	0
Pen and paper .....	0	0	6
Blotting-paper .....	0	0	6
Messenger to Paternoster-row and back	0	1	6
Again, when No Answer .....	0	1	6
Brandy, 2S., Devilled Pork chop 2S. ....	0	4	0
Pens and paper .....	0	1	0
Message to Albemarle-street and back...	0	1	0
Again (detained), when No Answer .....	0	1	6
Saltcellar broken .....	0	3	6
Large Liqueur-glass Orange Brandy .....	0	1	6
Dinner, Soup Fish Joint and bird .....	0	7	6
Bottle old East India Brown .....	0	8	0
Pen and Paper .....	0	0	6
	£ 2	16	6
	£ 2	16	6

(4-5)

The bill is an inventory of the insalubrious lifestyle of a struggling urban writer, which, to Christopher, casts a “yet more lurid halo” (5) over the mystery of Somebody and his luggage. He lives in temporary accommodation, swamped in paper and ink, resolutely pursuing his calling despite being snubbed by the booksellers (the unanswered messages to Paternoster Row and Albemarle Street). He has the same air of mystery as the “shabby-genteel” man described in Dickens’s sketch “Seven Dials” who “was never known to buy anything beyond an occasional pen, except half pints of coffee, penny loaves, and ha’porths of ink,” which leads his fellow lodgers to suppose that he is an author.<sup>21</sup> The itemised arrangement of the bill encourages us to read it as a causal temporal sequence: “No Answer” from Albermarle Street leads to a saltcellar being broken (perhaps hurled at the wall or swiped off the table in an angry rage?) and then to a large

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<sup>21</sup> Charles Dickens, “Seven Dials,” in *Sketches by Boz and Other Early Papers, 1833-39*, vol. 1 of *The Dent Uniform Edition of Dickens’ Journalism*, ed. Michael Slater (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1994), 74.



brandy. During the course of the story Somebody consumes Port Negus, brandy, orange brandy, boiling brandy-and-water, wine, and East India Brown sherry.<sup>22</sup> The general air of intemperance is reinforced by Christopher's memory of his father taking very little sustenance, "excepting from a liquid point of view" (2) whilst his workplace, the Old Dust-Binn, was in decline, and Christopher's own recourse to the bottle at the thought of Somebody's return. Channelling an aura of bohemian dissipation, Christopher recasts Somebody's obsessive writing as something between a messy sexual act and a murder: "[t]o whatever deplorable act of ungovernable composition he immolated those materials obtained from the bar, there is no doubt that the fatal deed was committed in bed, and that it left its evidences but too plainly, long afterwards, upon the pillow-case" (6). Immolated suggests sacrifice, but also fire. While "flushed with the heated stimulant" (47) – boiling brandy-and-water – Somebody spends two hours producing a manuscript which he immediately burns, as though it precedes his own imminent spontaneous combustion, like the gin-soaked Krook in *Bleak House*, who was "continual in liquor."<sup>23</sup>

Alcohol and ink, these liquids stain and flush the surface of his skin, until the distinction between Somebody and his work is either blurred by heat which threatens to consume them, or annihilated in daubs of ink. When Somebody has finished amending his proofs at the end of the story, Christopher remarks that

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<sup>22</sup> Frederick Dickens died in 1868. Sala reported that except for a penny bun and ginger beer for breakfast, he had been surviving mainly on gin. See Paul Schlicke, ed., *Oxford Reader's Companion to Dickens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 57.

<sup>23</sup> Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, ed. Nicola Bradbury (London: Penguin, 2003), 505.

“few could have said which was them, and which was him, and which was blots” (48). This unruliness with ink anticipates Mr Boffin’s attempt to learn to read and write in *Our Mutual Friend* (published between 1864 and 1865), a novel which contains vast quantities of fluttering paper:

It is curious to consider, in such a case as Mr Boffin’s, what a cheap article ink is, and how far it may be made to go. As a grain of musk will scent a drawer for many years, and still lose nothing appreciable of its original weight, so a halfpenny-worth of ink would blot Mr Boffin to the roots of his hair and the calves of his legs, without inscribing a line on the paper before him, or appearing to diminish the inkstand.<sup>24</sup>

Rather than forming legible lines, ink stains and smudges, and paper is whirled away on the wind.<sup>25</sup> The messy materiality of Somebody’s handwriting means that his work is always on the verge of being reduced to its constituent parts, of illegible blotches of ink and paper for burning; that is, of course, until it becomes, Somebody proudly exclaims, “Per-rint” (48). That Somebody becomes, eventually, indistinguishable from paper and ink suggests that writing is connected with identity: the border between himself and his work dissolves into blots. But this very emphasis on the irreducible materiality of writing, and through Christopher the characterisation of authorship as a vocal performance, resists a straightforward interiorisation of the author’s work. Authorship is as

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<sup>24</sup> Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, ed. Adrian Poole (London: Penguin, 1997), 179–80.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Cohen argued that in *Our Mutual Friend*, “the materiality of paper exists in tension with its legibility” in a talk entitled “Silas Wegg’s Legs” at *Dickens Universe*, a conference at the University of Santa Cruz, August 2014.

much a matter of public performance, as private labour, as dependent upon material culture, as upon intangible cerebral contemplation.<sup>26</sup>

As well as the copious amount of alcohol consumed, the sheer quantity of writing paper leads Christopher to believe that Somebody was “always at it”: “[t]here was writing in his dressing-case, writing in his boots, writing among his shaving-tackle, writing in his hat-box, writing folded away down among the very whalebones of his umbrella” (5). That the umbrella might be a good place to display text had already been jokingly suggested in a cartoon in *Punch* (1847), which pointed out that the umbrella canvas was one of the only smooth spaces in the city still unadulterated by advertising bills.<sup>27</sup> But as a place to conceal text, being an inherently outdoors object, it seems a strange choice, as though the author were trying to surreptitiously smuggle his work into the public domain, rather than openly expose it there. The emphasis on the umbrella, of all the items on Christopher’s list, anticipates in a subtle way the text’s investment in the ambiguous distinction between public and private lives, and the ambivalent desire to both reveal and conceal something; to fold something away in an object that is designed to be, inevitably, opened up.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Thomas argues that the *All the Year Round* Christmas Numbers explore the idea of public entertainment, in *Dickens and the Short Story*, 97.

<sup>27</sup> See Sara Thornton, *Advertising, Subjectivity and the Nineteenth-Century Novel: Dickens, Balzac and the Language of the Walls* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 37.

<sup>28</sup> In a chapter on umbrellas in Dickens, Bowen points out their multiple functions, including as “containers.” See Bowen, “Dickens’s Umbrellas,” in *Dickens’s Style*, ed. Daniel Tyler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 29.

Dickens's life was burdened by stacks of papers at this time of year, the "interminable contributions for the Christmas No." which he had to read.<sup>29</sup> The emphasis in *Somebody's Luggage*, then, on the materiality of writing is hardly surprising; as a writer and ardent letter writer, Dickens's life was of course full of paper.<sup>30</sup> The ubiquity of Somebody's paper, in an historical sense, calls to mind the extraordinary proliferation of print culture, aided in no small way by cheap periodical literature of the sort that Dickens was engaged in producing and publishing in the period, and the sheer pervasiveness of printed material in the form of handbills, posters, newspapers, periodicals, and books. The duty on paper had been abolished in 1861, the year before *Somebody's Luggage* was published, which made paper cheaper and gave a boost to the print industry.<sup>31</sup> The fact that the manuscripts are intermingled with everyday functional objects also hints at the way that paper and printed matter were reused. Paper was an eminently recyclable material, as Leah Price has discussed, and typically found a second (or third, and so on) use as wrapping for food, or new lining for a travelling case.<sup>32</sup> In *A Message from the Sea*, Tom Pettifer lines his hat with a sheet of paper, which turns out to be the very same sheet from an old clerk's book that is required to solve the mystery of the stolen money that drives the

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<sup>29</sup> Pilgrim, 11:268.

<sup>30</sup> John Bowen, *Other Dickens: Pickwick to Chuzzlewit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 52.

<sup>31</sup> Leah Price, *How To Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 141.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 225–26, 231.

narrative (47).<sup>33</sup> But Somebody's eccentric handling of his manuscripts is more than treating them as mere padding: "[i]n some cases, such as his Boots, he would appear to have hid the writings: thereby involving his style in greater obscurity" (6). One may wonder what is being obscured in the style of "His Boots" particularly. To John Bowen, the story, about a man who has gone to France after arguing with his daughter, and who adopts an orphaned baby girl named Bebelle, could be read as Dickens's response to the possible birth and death of his and Ellen Ternan's illegitimate child in France.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, Rosemarie Bodenheimer has identified precisely these "little games of telling and not telling," like the references to blacking which punctuate his works, as an element of Dickens's own style.<sup>35</sup> As writers become like manuscripts (ink-stained, or hidden away – as Dickens was, in France, for much of the year 1862)<sup>36</sup> and manuscripts are entwined around things, the locus of interiority and identity seems to shift. Christopher's response to the mystery of Somebody suggests that texts (bills as well as stories) might have something to tell about their producers, just as things do about their owners.

The items of luggage are at once intimate articles of personal property, and impersonal objects, which can be easily separated from their owner and used by someone else (Christopher parts with Somebody's clothes to a second-hand dealer). On one hand, the idea that someone's writing might be sold like a

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<sup>33</sup> This comes from the final part, "The Restitution," by Dickens and Collins.

<sup>34</sup> John Bowen, "Bebelle and 'His Boots': Dickens, Ellen Ternan and the *Christmas Stories*," *The Dickensian* 96 (2000): 206–7.

<sup>35</sup> Bodenheimer, *Knowing Dickens*, 69.

<sup>36</sup> Bowen, "Bebelle and 'His Boots,'" 201.

piece of second-hand clothing undoubtedly points towards contemporary publishing conditions; towards the anonymity of the contributors to *Household Words*, *All the Year Round*, and many other publications, but also perhaps, less directly, to deficient copyright laws which meant that unauthorised publications and plagiarisms were rife. That the pavement artist of Dickens's "His Brown-Paper Parcel" of the same Number rubs out "the last traces of [his chalk drawings], so that nobody can renew the same" (34), might also be a reference to this kind of literary borrowing. It was a subject that vexed Dickens greatly, which is perhaps why he turned it into a joke, as he did with other vexing subjects.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, the story is driven to seek the original author, and builds up to his return. One of the contributed stories, "His Umbrella" by John Oxenford, is also concerned with ownership. The story describes a man who is haunted by an umbrella that he acquired from a vanishing woman, reversing the usual problem of umbrellas being all too easily misplaced. This umbrella is no mere commodity; it is a large, gingham umbrella, with the initials of the dead woman carved into the elaborate, ivory handle. He tries to dispose of it among the ordinary domestic items that have been discarded in the lumber-room, which, "huddled together in a fashion totally at variance with their original purpose, [had] a corpse-like appearance" (16). But it has a power of its own, and only disappears when its ghostly owner comes to claim it on the anniversary of the date they met. In her discussion of cast-off clothing in the articles of *Household Words*, Waters describes clothes as "inanimate things that somehow retain the vestiges of the

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<sup>37</sup> Douglas-Fairhurst, *Becoming Dickens*, 38.

lives of former wearers.”<sup>38</sup> Indeed, Somebody’s writings have something in common with this strange accessory: the umbrella is as potentially useful for one person as the next, but it retains a powerful, irrepressible connection to the owner; that is, the one whose name is inscribed, or in the case of the writing, the one who has done the inscribing.

Michel Foucault wrote that in modern literary culture, an anonymous publication is like “a puzzle to be solved,” as “literary works are totally dominated by the sovereignty of the author.”<sup>39</sup> Anonymous publishing was commonplace in mid-Victorian periodical publishing, and seen variously as a format which either hindered professional progression and undermined accountability, or which enabled freedom of expression and privacy to the author.<sup>40</sup> Charles Collins’s story, “To Be Taken At the Dinner-Table” (*DMP*), which touches on the subject of anonymity, is about a riddle writer who agrees to supply a private client,

from time to time, with certain specimens of epigrammatic literature, now a riddle, now an epigram, now a short story that could be briefly and effectively told, all of which should be guaranteed to be entirely new and original, which should be made over wholly and solely to him, and to which no other human being should have access on any consideration whatever. (17)

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<sup>38</sup> Waters, *Commodity Culture*, 143.

<sup>39</sup> Michel Foucault, “What Is an Author?” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 126.

<sup>40</sup> Robert J. Griffin, ed., *The Faces of Anonymity: Anonymous and Pseudonymous Publication from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 6–8; see also Drew, *Dickens the Journalist*, 105–36; and Waters, *Commodity Culture*, 27.

This story describes an alternative version of the relationship of procurement that existed between Dickens and his Christmas Number contributors. The understanding that the creations should be given “solely” to the individual client, hints towards the contractual limitations that might be placed upon authors who wished to republish their work elsewhere. P. D. Edwards recounts an occasion in early 1857 when Sala wrote furiously to fellow contributor Edmund Yates, claiming that Dickens had refused to allow him to republish twenty-five of his old articles for *Household Words*; an accusation which Edwards finds “hardly rings true,” given that Sala was currently in arrears with the journal, and might thus have been able to pay off his debt.<sup>41</sup> Critics have tended to emphasise the frustration of Dickens’s contributors at his inflexible policy of anonymity and his exacting requirements; Nayder, for example, reiterates Edwards’s account of Sala’s complaint about Dickens as evidence that Dickens’s policies were designed to best serve himself.<sup>42</sup> Collins’s story conveys a more nuanced version of the relationship between paymaster and paid hand. The writer’s “commercial dealings” with his client were “satisfactorily established” and “renewed steadily and at frequent intervals,” but that “as in all earthly relations, there were not wanting some unpleasant elements to qualify the generally comfortable arrangements,” namely, the client’s complaint that some of the writer’s witticisms had missed their mark (18). Indeed, the relationship only breaks

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<sup>41</sup> Edwards, *Dickens’s “Young Men,”* 35–38.

<sup>42</sup> Nayder, *Unequal Partners*, 20–21; for interesting alternative viewpoints of the way anonymity effected Dickens, see Melisa Klimaszewski’s introduction to Charles Dickens, *Another Round of Stories by the Christmas Fire* (London: Hesperus, 2008), xvi; and Drew, *Dickens the Journalist*, 123.



down when he accidentally sells the same riddle to two clients (like a breach of copyright agreement), who attempt to tell it at the same party, at the same time.

The opening passage of Collins's story plays upon the fact that that there existed in the metropolis an extensive and protean literary-verbal culture, much of which was unattributed:

Does any one know who gives the names to our streets? Does any one know who invents the mottoes which are inserted in the cracker-papers, along with the sugar-plums? – I don't envy him his intellectual faculties, by-the-by, and I suspect him to be the individual who translates the books of the foreign operas. Does any one know who introduces the new dishes, Kromeski's, and such-like? Does any one know who is responsible for new words, such as shunt and thud, shimmer, ping (denoting the crack of the rifle), and many others? Does any one know who has obliged us to talk for ever about "fraternising" and "cropping up"? Does any one know the Sage to whom perfumers apply when they have invented a shaving-soap, or hair-wash, and who furnishes the trade with such names for their wares as Rypophagon, Euxesis, Depilatory, Bostrakeison? Does any one know who makes the riddles? (15)

The accumulative effect of the repeated phrase, "Does any one know," drolly brings home that within this vast public discourse there were certain types of literature – in its broadest sense – that were "given," "invented," "translated," "introduced," and so on, rather than "authored." "[A]n anonymous poster attached to a wall may have a writer, but he cannot be an author," Foucault suggests.<sup>43</sup> Collins's text implicitly acknowledges what Foucault was later to schematise; that for a text to be "authored" indicates the presence of certain discursive features, and a certain status within a given culture and society, which does not accrue to all texts equally.<sup>44</sup> A street name isn't authored, any more than

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<sup>43</sup> Foucault, "What Is an Author?" 124.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 123–24.

the pseudo-scientific names for toiletries, dreamt up by advertisers. Nor are the anonymous inventors and disseminators of popular spoken phraseology to be considered authors. Nevertheless, the riddle writer rather optimistically considers his work to be of high cultural value. Indeed, he characterises an old schoolmaster who had accused him of “Dangerous Satirising,” following the circulation of one of his riddles, as having “no taste for the fine arts” (16). As such, he bears a remarkable resemblance to the narrator of Dickens’s “His Brown-Paper Parcel,” a pavement artist who describes himself pointedly as being in the “Fine Art line” (30). Perhaps Collins was enacting a tongue-in-cheek reversal of his own subordinate role, in which the paymaster, an “admirer of genius,” buys stories from a younger writer, to whom he proclaims himself “your very humble servant” (17). The writer’s original client sounds rather like Dickens himself: a “middle-aged gentleman of rather plethoric appearance, with a sly twinkle in his eye, and with humorous lines about his mouth” (17). This seems less likely considering the client is also referred to as “getting old and stupid” (18), which would be dangerous indeed if the target was one’s employer and father-in-law (Collins had married Dickens’s daughter Kate in 1860). Whether it aims to poke fun at hack writers, or unimaginative middle-aged gentlemen, the story is suggestive of the potential variety of invisible commercial arrangements that underpin the way that literature was commissioned and circulated in the city.

There are some striking parallels between Collins’s story and Dickens’s “His Brown-Paper Parcel,” which is also interested in private commercial arrangements. The narrator is Tom, a malcontent who earns his living as a pavement artist. “You have seen my works many a time” Tom says, “though it’s

fifty thousand to one if you have seen me" (30), a phrase which suggests (rather than explicitly evokes) a literary culture in which celebrity and anonymous publishing coexist, not entirely unproblematically. Because Tom dislikes the public aspect of his work – the “shivering,” the “liveliness,” “the-wanting-employment-in-an-office move” – he rents his drawings to others who pretend to be him: “[s]uch is genius in a commercial country” (34). Like the person who goes out to wait but is *not* a waiter, the man you see on the pavement “with the papers of chinks and the rubbers, touching up the down-strokes of the writing and shading off the salmon,” is *not* an artist, but a mere “Commercial character” (34). Dickens’s pavement artist, like Somebody, whose work Christopher sells as his own, or the writer of riddles, who sells his creations to be used at social occasions, receives no public credit for his work. As such, he sees himself, rather dramatically, as a “blighted public character” (30).<sup>45</sup> There were writers who felt that anonymity was injurious to their careers, an issue that was compounded when articles and stories in Dickens’s journals, printed under the banner “Conducted by Charles Dickens,” were mistaken for his own work.<sup>46</sup> The pavement artist, of course, chooses to keep his identity private, and so his self-pitying hyperbole playfully skirts the real controversy about anonymity as a policy, to focus instead on the artist’s incompatible desires for both recognition and personal privacy.

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<sup>45</sup> On “His Brown-Paper Parcel” as a comment upon collaborative writing, see Klimaszewski and Valiska Gregory’s introduction to *Somebody’s Luggage*, xi; on anonymity, see Thomas, *Dickens and the Short Story*, 96–97.

<sup>46</sup> Nayder, *Unequal Partners*, 20; Waters, *Commodity Culture*, 22.

The prevalence of anonymous literature didn't mean that readers were not interested in the individual behind the print or in valorising the figure of the author. After the third or fourth repetition, the phrase "Does anyone know" from Collins's story might be taken as "does anyone care." Tom the pavement artist challenges his reader, "[y]ou say your interest is in my works and not in me? Don't be too sure about that" (30), which portrays the public as less concerned by the anonymity of artists (and perhaps, by extension, writers) than the artists themselves. Nevertheless, it seems that reviewers, and therefore perhaps readers also, did care, and tried to identify Dickens's contributions to the Christmas Numbers from the very beginning. Waters suggests that for faithful readers of Dickens's journals, the individual voices of his regular contributors were "readily distinguishable," despite the exclusion of the author's name.<sup>47</sup> This certainly seems to have been the case with Dickens's contributions to the Christmas Numbers. "Who does not recognise the same hand in both?" one reviewer wrote of "The Schoolboy's Story" and "Nobody's Story" in 1853.<sup>48</sup> A reviewer of "His Boots" speculated, correctly, that "[o]f course no one but the Master could have written that." The same reviewer finds that "the hand of the Master is delightfully visible in the whole design and texture of the story of the Luggage."<sup>49</sup> This is quite literally true, as Dickens intentionally makes visible his hand as editor in acts of staged censorship. As Christopher advances through a

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<sup>47</sup> Waters, *Commodity Culture*, 7.

<sup>48</sup> "The Literary Examiner," *Examiner*, December 24, 1853. John Forster was the editor of the *Examiner* at this time, so may have given the writer of this review a hint about the authorship of individual stories.

<sup>49</sup> "Literature," *Daily News*, December 6, 1862.

long-winded tribute – “was I not [in selling the manuscripts to *All the Year Round*] placing myself in the hands of One of whom it may be said, in the words of Another” (45) – the editor’s modesty compels him to cut Christopher off mid-sentence. A bracketed statement at the bottom of the page reads, for explication, “the remainder of this complimentary parenthesis editorially struck out.” It is a bizarre and humorous sentence, in which Dickens (almost) praises himself through Christopher, in the words of “Another” third fictional character. During the serialisation of Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Cranford* in *Household Words*, Dickens really did edit out references to himself as Boz and his novel *The Pickwick Papers*: “that strange old book, with the queer name, poor Captain Brown was killed for reading – that book by Mr Boz, you know.”<sup>50</sup> Gaskell scholars have made clear that she was unimpressed with Dickens’s editorial interventions, which is natural, and she wasn’t the only author to seek complete control over her work.<sup>51</sup> Nayder quotes a letter from Dickens to Wilkie Collins which mocks a contributor to *Household Words* for having explicitly stipulated that no one, not even Dickens himself, should amend her text.<sup>52</sup> It was certainly not a given that

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<sup>50</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *Cranford*, ed. Elizabeth Porges Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 22; on Dickens’s amendment, see Hilary M. Schor, *Scheherazade in the Marketplace: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 91, 96; see also Thomas Recchio, *Elizabeth Gaskell’s Cranford: A Publishing History* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 46.

<sup>51</sup> Jenny Uglow, *Elizabeth Gaskell: A Habit of Stories* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), 460; Schor, *Scheherazade in the Marketplace*, 92.

<sup>52</sup> Pilgrim, 7:575-76; Nayder, *Unequal Partners*, 23. Drew refers to an article that Dickens wrote with Henry Morley, published April 16, 1853, entitled “H. W.,” which made fun of the unsolicited articles sent to him by hopeful writers, in *Dickens the Journalist*, 119–20.

all of Dickens's contributors would be as eager as Christopher to write complimentary statements about him.

The feelings were perhaps mutual. Working with other writers entailed particular difficulties for Dickens, as he revealed in a letter to Wills in 1868:<sup>53</sup>

I have been, and still am – which is worse – in a positive state of despair about the Xmas No. I cannot get an idea for it which is in the least satisfactory to me, and yet I have been steadily trying all this month. I have invented so many of these Christmas Nos. and they are so profoundly unsatisfactory after all with the introduced Stories and their want of cohesion or originality, that I fear I am sick of the thing. I have had serious thoughts of abandoning the Xmas No.! There remain but August and September to give to it (as I begin to read in October), and I CAN NOT see it.<sup>54</sup>

Dickens makes a joking allusion to the shortcomings of some of the contributed work, which he had often privately lamented, in Christopher's statement that "[i]f there should be any flaw in the writings, or anything missing in the writings, it is Him [Somebody] as is responsible – not me. With that observation in justice to myself, I for the present conclude" (6). Indeed, Tom the pavement artist's grievance is equally his lack of public recognition and the troubling inferiority of his collaborators. In her study of the collaborative work of Dickens and Wilkie Collins, Nayder argues that Dickens used the Christmas Number stories to "represent and justify his authority over his contributors": for example, as the "heroic captain" in *The Wreck of the Golden Mary*.<sup>55</sup> Though the "Commercial character" of "His Brown-Paper Parcel" performed his role with "the greatest

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<sup>53</sup> See Glancy, "Dickens and Christmas," 58.

<sup>54</sup> Pilgrim, 12:159.

<sup>55</sup> Nayder, *Unequal Partners*, 27–35.

confidence, he did it . . . in so ignorant a manner, and so spoilt everything he touched” (33), that Tom is compelled intervene. Dickens wrote “His Brown-Paper Parcel” because Wilkie Collins was too ill to contribute to the Christmas Number that year, and Dickens envisaged producing a “short odd comic notion, to supply [his] place.”<sup>56</sup> Odd indeed, to supply the place of your real-life collaborator with a story about a man whose tone is rancorous and egocentric; who is hungry for recognition, but wary of public attention; who wants and doesn’t want to reveal his identity; who is both needful and disdainful of his collaborators who, he emphasises, cannot reproduce his own “celebrated effects” (34). In Tom’s case, though his claims for artistic superiority are no doubt justified, they are enough to drive away those he is close to.

Dickens is perhaps at his most mischievous when he underlines the power imbalance between contributor and editor. Christopher discovers, while delivering his own story to *All the Year Round*, that the printers had been entirely unable to read Somebody’s messy amendments to the proofs, and that

a certain gentleman in company, as I will not more particularly name – but of whom it will be sufficient to remark, standing on the broad basis of a wave-girt isle, that whether we regard him in the light of [again, here the “remainder of this complimentary parenthesis editorially struck out”] laughed, and put the corrections in the fire. (48)

Christopher’s sycophantic efforts, the editor’s (false) modesty and cursory attention to the author’s amendments, might conceivably have piqued some of his contributors, or of course have been taken as a good-natured in-joke. But yet again, Somebody’s work ends up in the fire.

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<sup>56</sup> Pilgrim, 10:137.

We are a bed business, and a coffee-room business. We are not a general dining business, nor do we wish it. . . . We are a Private Room or Family business also; but Coffee Room principal. (3)

The term “coffee-room,” which upon its second occurrence in this passage has grown into capitals and lost its hyphen, as if it has swollen into an amplified echo, calls up Dickens’s description to Forster of a coffee shop that he used to visit as a child on his tea break from the blacking factory. The shop had an “oval glass-plate” in the door with “COFFEE-ROOM painted on it” and the sight of those words, viewed the wrong way, as “MOOR-EEFFOC,” sent a shock through him, even as an adult.<sup>57</sup> If, as Bodenheimer suggests, the word “coffee-room” reappears throughout Dickens’s first novel, *The Pickwick Papers*, “like a signpost pointing to a suppressed memory,” then in *Somebody’s Luggage*, a quarter of a century later, it is thrust to the forefront as a stage upon which to enact a drama about bad parents, a working child who receives a practical education, and authorship.<sup>58</sup>

A great deal has been written on the subject of the socio-historical role of the coffee-room, which is generally described as having become a key site in the metropolis from the late seventeenth century for the consumption and discussion of reading materials, both literary and political, and the transacting of

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<sup>57</sup> Forster, *Life*, 1:37; Chesterton famously read this as “the motto of all effective realism,” in *Charles Dickens*, 19th ed. (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1940), 34.

<sup>58</sup> Bodenheimer, *Knowing Dickens*, 74.



business.<sup>59</sup> The historical position of the coffee shop as a nexus point between verbal and literary cultures is reflected in Christopher's narrative style, which blends a performative style with a heavy-handed attempt to cultivate a sophisticated authorly persona. He refers in affected tones to his "artless narrative" (6), his "unassuming pen" (6), and to the "Fair" (1), "gentle" (45), "observant" (46), and "intellectual" (46) reader. He even opens his story with a flattering authorial dedication to Joseph,

much respected Head Waiter at the Slamjam Coffee-house, London, E.C., than which a individual more eminently deserving of the name of man, or a more amenable honour to his own head and heart, whether considered in the light of a Waiter or regarded as a human being, do not exist. (1)

Within and alongside the authorial tone and the emphasis on manuscripts and printed proofs, the inflections and cadences of the spoken word and the verbal culture of the coffee-room come through with equal force. "Then look," Christopher complains, "what you are expected to know":

You are never out, but they seem to think you regularly attend everywhere. "What's this, Christopher, that I hear about the smashed Excursion Train?" – "How are they doing at the Italian Opera, Christopher?" – "Christopher, what are the real particulars of this business at the Yorkshire Bank?" Similarly a ministry gives me more trouble than it gives the Queen. As to Lord Palmerston, the constant and wearing connexion into which I have been brought with his lordship during the last few years, is deserving of a pension. (2)

In calling up the voices of his customers, Christopher presents the Head Waiter as a conventionally accepted source for the transmission of cultural, financial,

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<sup>59</sup> See John Barrell, "Coffee-House Politicians," *Journal of British Studies* 43, no. 2 (2004): 210. doi:10.1086/380950.

and political news, something he has in common, perhaps, with the editor of a popular periodical. Indeed, Christopher shares in Dickens's dislike of Prime Minister Lord Palmerston, whom Michael Slater describes as one of Dickens's particular "*bêtes noires*," whom he had lampooned in *Household Words*.<sup>60</sup>

The coffee house, Jennifer Wicke has argued, was an integral site in the nascent growth of the metropolitan advertising system at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It was an informal system at first, both written and verbal, in which coffee house owners would allow the posting of signs on message boards, or would become involved themselves in communicating corporate messages or connecting tradespeople.<sup>61</sup> According to Wicke, Dickens's career coincided with and helped to shape the birth of advertising, and his work, from the early sketches to the late novels, engaged with the development of advertising towards the formal, codified, and pervasive system that it became.<sup>62</sup> Waters has developed this argument more recently in her study of *Household Words*, in which she argues that articles in the periodical often engaged thematically with and sought to critique advertising, but they also shared in some of its discursive practices.<sup>63</sup> The line "Conducted by Charles Dickens," which appears at the top of double pages in the Christmas Number and regular numbers of Dickens's

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<sup>60</sup> Michael Slater, *Charles Dickens: A Life Defined by Writing* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 389.

<sup>61</sup> Jennifer Wicke, *Advertising Fictions: Literature, Advertisement, and Social Reading* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 23–24.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 19, 21.

<sup>63</sup> Waters, *Commodity Culture*, 19; see also Hazel Mackenzie, Ben Winyard, and John Drew, "All the Year Round, Volume 1: 30 April - 22 October, 1859 Nos. 1-26," *Dickens Quarterly* 29, no. 3 (2012): 257.

journals was a “form of branding,” which drew on advertising’s “rhetoric of authenticity,” which uses the weight of Dickens’s reputation to promote the publication.<sup>64</sup> The tone of Christopher’s narrative is largely governed by a rhetorical strategy of self-promotion (though in this he is less explicit than Doctor Marigold, who claims to top even his father in the Cheap Jack stakes), as well as occasionally descending into a puff piece about Dickens himself – albeit modestly foreshortened by the editor’s redactions. Moreover, Christopher laments the way in which he must perform an attitude of confidence and expertise to maximise his profits, as advertising would, by feigning an interest in horse racing, farming, and shooting to please his customers, for “it would be half our little incomes out of our pockets if we didn’t take on to have those sporting tastes” (2). Perhaps because the coffee-room was associated with an air of (disingenuous) promotional speak, Dickens makes a point of stifling Christopher’s attempt to promote his coffee-room with another editorial intervention, “[i]ts name and address at length, with other full particulars, all editorially struck out” (3). The following year, Emma Lirriper is bluntly critical of what she sees as underhand modern advertising tactics:

My dear you never have found Number Eighty-one Norfolk Street Strand advertised in Bradshaw’s Railway Guide and with the blessing of Heaven you never will or shall so find it. Some there are who do not think it lowering themselves to make their names that cheap and even going the lengths of a portrait of the house not like it with a blot in every window and a coach and four at the door . . . . (1)

The righteousness of her admonishment is diminished somewhat by the fact that it begins with the opportunistic inclusion of her address, which had already been

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<sup>64</sup> Waters, *Commodity Culture*, 21.

given in full, this time helpfully fleshed out with persuasive detail as being “situated midway between the City and St. James’s and within five minutes’ walk of the principal places of public amusement” (1). The phrase “Conducted by Charles Dickens” shows that Dickens realised the selling power of his own name, but this may have been underpinned by an apprehension of his own name becoming “cheap,” perhaps due to the “flood of goods” that capitalised on Dickens’s name and characters to sell, from umbrellas to corduroy trousers.<sup>65</sup>

The advertising strategy for *Somebody’s Luggage*, in which the title of the Number was printed initially, without any further gloss, on posters and in newspapers, had the effect of drawing Dickens’s potential readers into the same sense of intrigue and embarrassing or risky exposure that Christopher describes. Just as the luggage “laid heavy on [Christopher’s] mind” (4), the question “[w]hose luggage can it be?” according to the *Daily News*, “has been mentally asked by thousands of her Majesty’s subjects for the last two months, and we dare say with qualms of conscience by some who had left their luggage at lodgings by way of security.”<sup>66</sup> Indeed, multiple publications reported the same story of a man who had written in, claiming to have lost the exact items on the list.<sup>67</sup> To unwitting readers, or those “[un]initiated in the art and mystery of bill-sticking,” the advert might have seemed like any one of an “intensely

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<sup>65</sup> Wicke, *Advertising Fictions*, 52.

<sup>66</sup> “Literature,” *Daily News*, December 6, 1862.

<sup>67</sup> “Local and General,” *Leeds Mercury*, December 15, 1862; see also Thornton, *Advertising*, 56–58.

unintelligible” mystery, a direct appeal to the conscience, or an accusation.<sup>68</sup> The advert for *Mrs Lirriper’s Lodgings* seems to have been similarly arresting: “[f]or months past the walls of London have been half clothed with bills bearing the words “Mrs Lirriper’s Lodgings.” Nobody could imagine what they meant, if they did not mean that some matronly speculative lady had enormous lodgings to let and had resolved the world should know it.”<sup>69</sup> Dickens evidently cared considerably about what impression the adverts gave: writing to Wills, he said “I saw the posters. It strikes me that the usual long large narrow one is *too black*. A red line round *Mrs Lirriper’s Legacy* would surely improve it. It looks to me as if it were designed to express that Mrs Lirriper was dead and we were in mourning.”<sup>70</sup> The relationship Dickens aimed to cultivate with his journal readers is conventionally discussed in terms of the familiarity and regular companionship indicated by the title of the earlier journal, taken from Shakespeare – “as familiar in our mouths as household words” – and the subtitle of the subsequent publication – “The story of our lives from year to year.”<sup>71</sup> Within the context of this advertising scheme, familiarity, or the jarring feeling of something striking close to home, takes on a rather more disconcerting aspect.

As Sara Thornton demonstrates in her study of nineteenth-century advertising, Dickens had a vivid sense of the ominous potential of advertising to

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<sup>68</sup> “Literature,” *Daily News*, December 6, 1862; “London Correspondence,” *Belfast News-Letter*, November 25, 1862.

<sup>69</sup> “Literature,” *Derby Mercury*, December 9, 1863.

<sup>70</sup> Pilgrim, 10: 446. Schor has shown that many of the arguments between Dickens and Gaskell related to the advertising of her work, in *Scheherazade in the Marketplace*, 92.

<sup>71</sup> Valerie L. Gager, *Shakespeare and Dickens: The Dynamics of Influence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 146.

seize the attention of the passer by. The narrator of his 1851 article “Bill-Sticking,” which she quotes, imagines taking revenge on an enemy by placing posters around the city that “darkly refer” to a secret that weighs on his conscience, that it may “haunt him . . . night and day.”<sup>72</sup> Indeed, Dickens’s posters for *Somebody’s Luggage*, which had “profusely placarded” public spaces, had partly accomplished this aim.<sup>73</sup> By mid-century, Thornton argues, “text was no longer something which had to be sought out and paid for dearly; it now sought out the subject, moved into the line of his or her gaze, and asked to be read.”<sup>74</sup> Contemporary commentators, she explains, expressed a sense of being personally targeted by advertising’s short, sharp slogans; she even draws on a contemporary advertising manual which used the advert for *Somebody’s Luggage* as a case in point of this phenomenon.<sup>75</sup> In Collins’s “To Be Taken at the Dinner-Table,” the comic hyperbole of the narrator’s description of his work as a riddle-writer can be compared with the more serious way that an omnipresent advertising culture was seen to oppress the individual:

*there is no end to it. . . .* If you go to the play, if you take up a newspaper, if you ensconce yourself in a corner with a blessed work of fiction, you find yourself still pursued and haunted by your profession. The dialogue to which you listen when you go to the theatre, the words of the book you are reading, may suggest something, and it behoves you to be on the look-out. Horrible and distracting calling! (17)

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<sup>72</sup> Dickens, “Bill-Sticking,” *Household Words*, no. 52 (March 22, 1851): 601; also quoted in Thornton, *Advertising*, 41.

<sup>73</sup> “General News,” *Dundee Courier & Argus*, November 24, 1862.

<sup>74</sup> Thornton, *Advertising*, 32.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 58–60.

This passage describes the way one might imagine an author such as Dickens would take his inspiration for his work from the scenes around him – dialogues overheard, little urban tableaux caught out of the corner of the eye – and reimagines it as a form of comic haunting. In Bret Harte’s parody of *The Haunted Man* (1865), Dickens himself is recast as the phantom, and his influence over contemporary literary culture, a haunting: “I see [his] influence . . . in the magazines and daily papers; I see weak imitators rise up and enfeeble the world with senseless formula.”<sup>76</sup> For Harte, Dickens’s successful formulae – the Christmas Number format being a prime example – were ghosts that the literary world could not, or would not shake. Dickens felt himself haunted by the yearly obligation, or perhaps compulsion, to produce the Christmas Number, as he made clear in an often-quoted letter to actor Charles Fechter:

after I have rested – don’t laugh – it is a grim reality – I shall have to turn my mind to – ha! ha! ha! – to – ha! ha! ha! (more sepulchrally than before) – the – the CHRISTMAS NUMBER! I feel as if I had murdered a Christmas number years ago (perhaps I did!) and its ghost perpetually haunted me.<sup>77</sup>

He turns anticipation into an act, in which he performs – for his actor friend – his yearly metamorphosis from normality, through a kind of comic hysteria, into a comic villain; a murderer of Christmas Numbers, like Somebody, who

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<sup>76</sup> Bret Harte, “The Haunted Man: A Christmas Story,” in *Stories and Condensed Novels*, vol. 5, *The Complete Works of Bret Harte* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1888), 454–55.

<sup>77</sup> Pilgrim, 12:67.

“immolated” his writing paper; a joke which playfully obscures, with “comic defiance” (his phrase to describe the 1862 Number), a darker state of mind.<sup>78</sup>

Thornton associates the sense of guilt and of personal implication and dread, seen in “Bill-Sticking,” and in the response to the *Somebody’s Luggage* advert, with the active and aggressive nature of advertising: how it seeks out and arrests its subjects in their tracks.<sup>79</sup> But in the case of *Somebody’s Luggage*, it is more significant that this sense of accusation and dread seem to anticipate Christopher’s response, for example, when a young man from *All the Year Round* delivers the proofs back to him with the words, “THE PROOFS. A. Y. R.”:

A. Y. R.? And You Remember. Was that his meaning? At Your Risk. Were the letters short for *that* reminder? Anticipate Your Retribution. Did they stand for *that* warning? Outdacious Youth Repent? But no; for that, a O was happily wanting, and the vowel here was a A. (46)

The initials look back to the melodramatic “D. N. F.” – do not forget – from *Little Dorrit*, and forward to the initials “P. J. T.” which are carved over the door in Mr Grewgious’s chambers in *Edwin Drood*.<sup>80</sup> Arguably, they look even further, beyond Dickens’s lifetime, to the semantic proliferation of the meaning of “HCE” in *Finnegans Wake*, just as Christopher’s “outdacious” spellings look forward to the slipperiness and linguistic freedom of modernism more generally.<sup>81</sup> The effect of the enigmatic initials here works in a different way to the arresting

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<sup>78</sup> Pilgrim, 10:129.

<sup>79</sup> Thornton, *Advertising*, 43.

<sup>80</sup> Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, ed. Stephen Wall and Helen Small (London: Penguin, 2003), 378; Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, 113.

<sup>81</sup> James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (London: Penguin, 1992), 32.



advertisements described by Thornton. Whilst the latter create the subject that looks at them, that is, they create guilt, or fear, or dissatisfaction that might not otherwise exist, here language is interpreted by the subject under the influence of a certain feeling, like guilt, and becomes a powerful projection of that feeling.<sup>82</sup> It was much the same for Pip, who read the vacant expression of the cows on the marsh as implying “Holloa, young thief!” as he made off with his sister’s pork pie.<sup>83</sup>

Through Christopher’s melodramatic account of his wait for the writer’s return, Dickens reimagines the sense of anticipation with which the public would greet the publication of the Christmas Number each year. One review states that Dickens’s Christmas Number was “always looked forward to and received with the greatest interest by the public.”<sup>84</sup> The *Morning Post* describes the “pleasurable anticipation” and “agreeable expectation” that preceded the publication of the Number each year.<sup>85</sup> Of the many prospective contributors, Percy Fitzgerald wrote that “[t]he time when ‘the Christmas Number’ had to be got ready was always one of pleasant expectancy and alacrity. It was an object for all to have a seat in ‘a vehicle’ which travelled every road and reached the houses of a quarter of a million persons,” an account which offers a different perspective to the critical emphasis on Dickens’s editorial quarrels with

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<sup>82</sup> Thornton, *Advertising*, 44.

<sup>83</sup> Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, ed. Charlotte Mitchell (London: Penguin, 2003), 17.

<sup>84</sup> “Mugby Junction,” *Bristol Mercury*, December 8, 1866.

<sup>85</sup> “Mrs. Lirriper’s Legacy,” *Morning Post*, December 3, 1864; “Mugby Junction,” *Morning Post*, December 13, 1866.

contributors.<sup>86</sup> In contrast, the concluding part of the Number describes, in the very same period of time leading up to the publication date, that Christopher's "wretchedness daily increased":

I got worse and worse in my meditations, constantly reflecting . . . that when Christmas drew nearer, and the Proofs were published, there could be no safety from hour to hour but that He [the author] might confront me in the Coffee Room, and in the face of day and his country demand his rights. (46)

Like David and Pip, and their creator, Christopher is particularly adept at describing his mental sufferings:

The reflection that the writings must now inevitably get into print, and that He might yet live and meet with them, sat like the Hag of Night upon my jaded form. The elasticity of my spirits departed. Fruitless was the Bottle, whether Wine or Medicine. I had recourse to both, and the effect of both upon my system was witheringly lowering. (45)

With his grandiose phrasing, antiquated syntax, and literary references (the "Hag of Night" might refer to "The Talisman of Oromanes" from *The Tales of the Genii*, one of Dickens's childhood favourites), Christopher evokes the rhetorical extremism of Mr Micawber, another "elastic" character.<sup>87</sup> After Micawber is released from debtors prison, David finds him and his wife strangely low: "[a]ll their elasticity was departed, and I never saw them half so wretched."<sup>88</sup> Elasticity, the ability to rebound, in the Micawbers' case from the deepest despair

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<sup>86</sup> Percy Fitzgerald, "Charles Dickens in the Editor's Chair," in vol. 3 of *Charles Dickens: Critical Assessments*, ed. Michael Hollington (Sussex: Helm Information Ltd, 1995), 796. Also quoted in Glancy, "Dickens and Christmas," 58.

<sup>87</sup> See Schlicke, *Oxford Reader's Companion*, 239.

<sup>88</sup> Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 183.

to unalloyed happiness, is played out in *Somebody's Luggage* as it moves between Christopher's account of his wretchedness towards the "Wonderful End"; a transition in which Dickens knowingly calls upon the formulaic stages of a full-length melodrama: the dramatic exposition which recounts Christopher's childhood suffering, the discovery of some hidden manuscripts, the anticipation of the "gloomy sequel of a mind with something on it" (6), to the surprise denouement which, through its title, announces itself in advance.

Dickens's letters on the subject of the Christmas Numbers encompass a similarly melodramatic spectrum of emotions. They are often tinged with humour, like his description in 1859 of his "state of temporary insanity (Annual with the Xmas No.," or his characterisation of the 1854 Number as a "Christmas Bull trying to toss [him]."<sup>89</sup> Despite this, it is certainly true that for Dickens producing the publication, from reading and selecting from the "immense heap of contributions," to his own "agonies of writing," was sometimes a deeply fraught experience.<sup>90</sup> Inspiration, that most intangible and unpredictable ghost, could be difficult to conjure up on demand: "[f]or the soul of me" he wrote to Wills in June 1868, "I cannot (hammer and think as I will) raise the ghost of an idea for the Xmas No."<sup>91</sup> Dickens frequently chooses the verb "hammer" to describe his work; indeed, the association of authorship with labour had become common discursive practice by the late 1840s, an idea which was played out

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<sup>89</sup> Pilgrim, 9:168; Pilgrim 7:475.

<sup>90</sup> Pilgrim, 11:261, 442.

<sup>91</sup> Pilgrim, 12:144.

through the “Dignity of Literature” debate.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, we might read some of his letters about the physical and mental strain of producing the Number, however comic, in this context. “At this present writing” he joked to Frederick Lehmann, “I am in some doubt whether I have any thing inside my head, or no. The Christmas No. has so addled it this week, that I don’t recognise it as mine,” an example which connects the cerebral work of authorship with the mindless rote more commonly associated with repetitive physical labour.<sup>93</sup> In response to an unimpressive manuscript by a gardener, sent to him by a friend, Dickens wrote that “the men who have laid down the spade or hammer for the pen, and become famous, have been among the most extraordinary men the world has ever produced.”<sup>94</sup> Dickens’s hammer/pen may be read along both class and gender lines, as both a masculine legitimation for the genteel work of authorship, and a way to connect his profession with the integrity of a trade associated with a traditional image of male strength, vigour, and productivity. After all, “hammer and think” is only two letters away from “hammer and clink,” which is what Joe the blacksmith does as he fixes the sergeant’s handcuffs in *Great Expectations*.<sup>95</sup>

Dickens was used to working “his head off,” and to the deleterious mental effects of overwork. In 1865, he wrote to the mother of frequent Christmas Number contributor Adelaide Anne Procter, “I am as right as a man can be who is

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<sup>92</sup> Salmon, *The Formation of the Victorian Literary Profession*, 107.

<sup>93</sup> Pilgrim, 10:314.

<sup>94</sup> Pilgrim, 6:127.

<sup>95</sup> Dickens, *Great Expectations*, 32; see also Drew, *Dickens the Journalist*, 181.

working his head off – beginning with the hair.”<sup>96</sup> Dickens’s joke recalls Christopher’s statement that after selling Somebody’s writings, he “discovered that peace of mind had fled from a brow which, up to that time, Time had merely took the hair off, leaving an unruffled expanse within” (45). The notion that a mind might be ruffled, like a head of hair, if indeed there is any left to ruffle, linguistically encodes the simultaneously mental and physical nature of Christopher’s anxiety, just as “hammer” and “think” suggests the dually mental and physical work of authorship. Dickens jokes that he might not have anything left inside his head, but his description of Somebody goes a step further. Perhaps the best image offered by the text for the sometimes strange and estranging act of modern authorship, is the writer’s apparent “headlessness”: “[h]e had put no Heading to any of his writings. Alas! Was he likely to have a Heading without a Head, and where was *his* Head when he took such things into it!” (6) A Head Waiter tells a story about a headless writer: a story which is concerned with power and identity; with anonymity and madness; and which introduces stories which the author had given no headings. In the latter sense, all of Dickens’s contributors were headless writers, as Dickens provided the headings for all of the Christmas Number stories.

Working one’s head off, losing one’s head, being without a head altogether: Dickens’s stories repeatedly draw together work, madness, and death. The connection between work and death seems particularly ominous in hindsight, given that Dickens is often considered to have worked himself to

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<sup>96</sup> Pilgrim, 11:77; see also, Pilgrim, 11:95, 809.

death, through a punishing schedule of public readings.<sup>97</sup> Of his child self, Christopher asks

what was your feelings one day when your father came home to your mother in open broad daylight – of itself an act of Madness on the part of a Waiter – and took to his bed (leastwise, your mother and family’s bed), with the statement that his eyes were devilled kidneys. Physicians being in vain, your father expired, after repeating at intervals for a day and a night, when gleams of reason and old business fitfully illuminated his being, “Two and two is five. And three is sixpence.” (2)

The passage connects Christopher to another of Dickens’s working children who had gone on to authorship and to narrate his own history. As his attention wandered in church, the young David Copperfield noticed an inscription on a stone tablet which stated that “physicians” had also been “in vain” for Mr Bodgers, who had “affliction sore” a “long time . . . bore,” a phrase which Jeremy Tambling identifies as drawing on a popular nineteenth-century epitaph.<sup>98</sup> The capitalised words in the passage – Madness and Waiter – emphasise the connection between work and insanity, where routine gives way to mechanical, meaningless repetition, and a loss of subjectivity that reduces the body to less than human, to thing, to a painful inflamed pair of devilled kidneys.<sup>99</sup> But it was not only the conjunction of work, death, and madness that interested Dickens, but family and money alongside these as well. Doctor Marigold explains of his parents,

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<sup>97</sup> Slater, *Charles Dickens*, 591–92.

<sup>98</sup> Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 27; see also note 4 by Tambling on p. 945.

<sup>99</sup> See Malcolm Andrews, “Falling Apart Laughing,” in *Dickensian Laughter: Essays on Dickens and Humour* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 99–123.

You can't go on for ever, you'll find, nor yet could my father nor yet my mother. If you don't go off as a whole when you are about due, you're liable to go off in part and two to one your head's the part. Gradually my father went off his, and my mother went off hers. . . . The old couple, though retired, got to be wholly and solely devoted to the Cheap Jack business, and were always selling the family off. (1)

These parents, who have gone off their heads, treat their family like commodities to be sold. By this time Dickens was, of course, used to his family leveraging money from him. He may even have had the decline of his own mother in mind when he wrote these parent deaths. In August of 1860, Dickens wrote to a friend:

My mother . . . is in the strangest state of mind from senile decay: and the impossibility of getting her to understand what is the matter, combined with her desire to be got up in sables like a female Hamlet, illumines the dreary scene with ghastly absurdity that is the chief relief I can find in it.<sup>100</sup>

The "ghastly absurdity" of his mother's degeneration is echoed in the deaths of these fictional parents – Christopher's father and the Marigolds – the latter made all the more absurd by the fact that, with his last words, Doctor Marigold's father threw himself and his wife into the bargain: "Here! Missis! Chuck the old man and woman into the cart, put the horse to, and drive 'em away and bury 'em!" (2). In the early 1860s, Dickens was also feeling his own body going off in parts: rheumatism was attacking his left side, neuralgia gave him terrible pain in his face, and in 1865 he would suffer a mild stroke, as well as the trauma of the Staplehurst rail accident, of which he wrote, "I begin to feel it more in my head. I sleep well and eat well; but I write half a dozen notes, and turn faint and sick."<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Pilgrim, 9:287.

<sup>101</sup> Pilgrim, 11:55; see also Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 874, 921, 970.

Somebody, too, may not have been in complete control of his body parts. The mystery of the broken tumbler and saltcellar on the bill is solved in the concluding part of the Number when Somebody is seen to “knoc[k] a plate of biscuits off the table with his agitated elber” (47).<sup>102</sup> The involuntary jerking of the “agitated elber” replays the motion of his elbow as he writes, and draws together the physical and psychic tension in the act of writing. The physicality of the artist’s task was described by Charles Baudelaire, a few years later in *The Painter of Modern Life*, in his description of artist Monsieur G.,

bending over his table, darting on to a sheet of paper the same glance that a moment ago he was directing towards external things, skirmishing with his pencil, his pen, his brush, splashing his glass of water up to the ceiling, wiping his pen on his shirt, in a ferment of violent activity, as though afraid that the image might escape him, cantankerous though alone, elbowing himself on.<sup>103</sup>

In this frenetic state, the artist’s lurching elbow becomes a sign of, but also the vehicle for, his artistic purpose. The “agitated elber,” by contrast, connects the act of writing with an uncontrollable physical twitch, or at the very least suggests that the act of writing led him to develop one. Dickens liked a little “elbow-room” when he was writing, by which he meant textual space. Indeed, if he found the relatively small numbers of *Hard Times* to be “C R U S H I N G,” perhaps the short

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<sup>102</sup> Pilgrim, 2:66. In this letter to Leigh Hunt, Dickens refers to an occasion when Hunt had knocked over a tumbler with his elbow, breaking it.

<sup>103</sup> Charles Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life,” in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), 11.



Christmas Number format occasionally gave him a touch of the “agitated elber.”<sup>104</sup>

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“I wonder,” Dickens wrote to a friend about the sales of *Somebody’s Luggage*, “how many people among those purchasers have any idea of the numbers of hours of steamboat, railway train, dusty French walk, and looking out of window, boiled down in ‘His Boots?’”<sup>105</sup> This story, and many other moments in the Christmas Numbers, seems to draw on and transform Dickens’s own experiences, from the troubled young women that Emma Lirriper deals with, like the ones Dickens may have met through his Urania Cottage venture, to the contemptuous Boy at Mugby Junction, who George Dolby, his tour manager, said was based on a real encounter.<sup>106</sup> The vivacity of the prose in these cases seems to denote very personal energies at play, but more specifically, with the narrators of these late Numbers, Dickens seems intentionally to tread an ambiguous line between invention and observation. Christopher’s account of himself is intended to represent, Dickens told Forster, “everything you know

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<sup>104</sup> Pilgrim, 7:282.

<sup>105</sup> Pilgrim, 10:181. On “His Boots” and autobiography, see Bowen, “Bebelle and ‘His Boots,’” 197.

<sup>106</sup> George Dolby, *Charles Dickens As I Knew Him: The Story of the Reading Tours in Great Britain and America (1866-1870)*, ed. Norman Page, vol. 4 of *Charles Dickens: Family History* (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1999), 30–31; see also Glancy, “Dickens and Christmas,” 58; and Jenny Hartley, *Charles Dickens and the House of Fallen Women* (London: Methuen, 2008), 38–40.

about waiters, presented humorously.”<sup>107</sup> Writing again to Forster, this time about Doctor Marigold, Dickens predicted that “[i]f people at large understand a Cheap Jack, my part of the Christmas number will do well. It is wonderfully like the real thing, of course a little refined and humoured.”<sup>108</sup> Reviewers picked up on this, with one suggesting that Emma Lirriper is “a photograph, not of an individual only, but of a class”;<sup>109</sup> another, that “[t]here are only twelve pages of Mrs Lirriper, and yet she is so drawn in that short space that we can scarcely believe that there really is no such person, and that a fortnight ago no one had ever heard of her.”<sup>110</sup> Emma and her lodger the Major were soon spoken of “as if they had both been as long in London and as well known as Norfolk-street itself.”<sup>111</sup> The use of real place-names, for example Norfolk Street in the *Lirriper* stories, Christopher’s reference to Blue-Anchor Road in Bermondsey, and both Christopher and Emma’s references to St. Clement Danes on the Strand, reinforced the sense that the characters belonged as much to the city as to fiction: “[o]f course Mrs Lirriper lived on the East side of the Street (how did you know it?),” Dickens wrote in a letter, “but not so far down as you suppose.”<sup>112</sup> In fact, number 81, where Emma says that she lives, did not exist on Norfolk Street,

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<sup>107</sup> Pilgrim, 10:126.

<sup>108</sup> Pilgrim, 11:99.

<sup>109</sup> “Literature,” *Era*, December 13, 1863.

<sup>110</sup> “Mrs Lirriper’s Lodgings,” *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, December 19, 1863; also quoted in Slater, *Charles Dickens*, 520. Philip Collins suggests that this review is probably by James Fitzjames Stephen, in Collins, ed., *Dickens: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1971), 413.

<sup>111</sup> Forster, *Life*, 1873, 3:337.

<sup>112</sup> Pilgrim, 10:323.

and one newspaper outlet reported that “[n]umbers of opaque individuals” had been wandering up and down the street, vainly searching for Mrs Lirriper’s lodgings.<sup>113</sup>

Such is the sense of authenticity, that Chesterton described the Christmas Stories as “scraps of journalism,” whilst in the same sentence referring to the “sumptuous satire” of Christopher’s monologue. “Every touch” of Christopher, he writes, “tingles with truth,” so that if Dickens had extended his monologue into a novel, he could have prevented a “type” from “disappearing from English history.”<sup>114</sup> In her study of Dickens and theatre, Deborah Vlock has argued that there existed a continuity between stage, novel, and other forms of text, including journalism, which meant that voices could be accepted as both natural and performed.<sup>115</sup> Just as the adverts for *Somebody’s Luggage* punctuated the real life of the city with the life of the text, the narrators themselves create a sense of ambiguity: they are “real” individuals and representatives of a class; creations of the city, and the unmistakable creations of Dickens himself. Dickens possesses the characteristic qualities of the modern artist, a “painter of the passing moment,” in Baudelaire’s oft-quoted phrase, and never more so than in these short pieces.<sup>116</sup> One reviewer of *Somebody’s Luggage* considered this quality more broadly as a feature of Dickens’s style, suggesting that his “figures are not *posed*, he catches them with his pencil as they walk along, and, more

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<sup>113</sup> “London Correspondence,” *Belfast News-Letter*, December 18, 1863.

<sup>114</sup> Chesterton, *Criticisms and Appreciations*, 80.

<sup>115</sup> Deborah Vlock, *Dickens, Novel Reading, and the Victorian Popular Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 101, 135.

<sup>116</sup> Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life,” 5.

clever in giving us streets than country lanes, he renders so closely that scarcely a paint blister on a shutter escapes him.”<sup>117</sup> Dickens captures the essence of a figure in a particular historical moment, and employs a style which, as Amanpal Garcha has suggested specifically of his sketches, captures the temporality of modern life itself.<sup>118</sup>

The introductory part of *Somebody's Luggage* demonstrates, comically, the act of transforming one's own experiences in writing, as Christopher prepares us to “learn from the biographical experience of one that is a Waiter in the sixty-first year of his age” (1). Glancy has suggested that it was the potential for figuring autobiographical storytelling, in which the tellers are drawing on their own experiences, that particularly drew Dickens to the framed-tale format.<sup>119</sup> Bodenheimer, however, is interested in what she sees as Dickens's ambivalent attitude towards autobiography, between a desire to both disclose and to repress angry and embittered stories, which he dealt with through his own literary games of “telling and not telling,” for example, in references to blacking and to coffee houses, both of which are present in *Somebody's Luggage*.<sup>120</sup> Christopher presents his life story in the second person, a way of telling and not telling by writing as if it were about someone else; perhaps doubly so if we consider that

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<sup>117</sup> “Somebody's Luggage,” *Era*, December 21, 1862.

<sup>118</sup> Amanpal Garcha, *From Sketch to Novel: The Development of Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 19.

<sup>119</sup> Glancy, “Dickens and Christmas,” 54–55; see also Glancy's introduction to Dickens, *The Christmas Stories*, xxiv.

<sup>120</sup> Bodenheimer, *Knowing Dickens*, 67–69.

Dickens was embedding elements of his own experience, however obscurely, in these stories. Christopher begins,

Your mother was married to your father (himself a distant Waiter) in the profoundest secrecy [*sic*]; for a Waitress known to be married would ruin the best of businesses – it is the same as on the stage. . . . When your brothers began to appear in succession, your mother retired, left off her smart dressing (she had previously been a smart dresser), and her dark ringlets (which had previously been flowing), and haunted your father late of nights, lying in wait for him, through all weathers, up the shabby court which led to the back door of the Royal Old Dust-Binn . . . . Sometimes he came out, but generally not. Come or not come, however, all that part of his existence which was unconnected with open Waitering, was kept a close secret, and was acknowledged by your mother to be a close secret, and you and your mother flitted about the court, close secrets both of you, and would scarcely have confessed under torture that you knew your father, or that your father had any name than Dick (which wasn't his name, though he was never known by any other), or that he had kith or kin or chick or child. (1-2)

It is the revelation of a secret about: a clandestine relationship and the birth of a child which, if known, would ruin the careers of both its parents; a man who has a public persona to uphold and a woman who goes into retirement and vanishes; a woman whose life is dominated by child-rearing and a man who pretends he has no children; a woman who remains nameless, and a man who was and was not called Dick. Dickens was sometimes called Dick, as in his letter to Clarkson Stanfield listing what were the “Dick contributions” to *Somebody's Luggage*.<sup>121</sup> At the time Dickens wrote this story, he was also seemingly concealing a relationship of his own, with Ellen Ternan, a woman who had been “on the stage” but had later retired and in the early 1860s had disappeared from public life altogether, as if she had been “conjured into thin air,” perhaps, some critics

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<sup>121</sup> Pilgrim, 10:170.

suggest, because she was pregnant with Dickens's child.<sup>122</sup> Of course, the woman who had previously been so charming, and who had borne Dick the waiter so many children, might recall Catherine, from whom Dickens had separated a few years earlier. Whatever kinds of telling and not telling are at play here, we can be sure that Christopher reveals something that, in the comic logic of his world, was taboo, forbidden, unmentionable.

The very revelation of the secret marriage in print suggests that public and private personas do not always remain as discrete as could be desired. Indeed, to Waters, the way that Dickens announced his separation – through a statement published in *Household Words* in 1858, in which he also denied certain salacious rumours that were circulating – demonstrates his own “impossible attempt to sustain a highly tenuous distinction between his public and private life.”<sup>123</sup> Christopher also uses the publication to repudiate certain rumours. He refers indignantly to the “universal libel” that Head Waiters are rich:

How did that fable get into circulation? Who first put it about, and what are the facts to establish the unblushing statement? Come forth, thou slanderer, and refer the public to the Waiter's will in Doctors' Commons supporting thy malignant hiss! (3)<sup>124</sup>

In the context of the scandal of Dickens's separation, Kreilkamp suggests that Dickens and his defenders repeatedly couched rumour as a form of “unauthorised” reproduction, like plagiarism or other types of copyright

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<sup>122</sup> Claire Tomalin, *The Invisible Woman: The Story of Nelly Ternan and Charles Dickens* (London: Penguin, 1991), 139–40; see also Bowen, “Bebelle and ‘His Boots,’” 206.

<sup>123</sup> Waters, *Dickens and the Politics of the Family*, 11.

<sup>124</sup> On the apparent wealth of the waiter, see Prendergast, “The Waiter,” 224.

violation.<sup>125</sup> The force of Christopher's statement about the illicit "circulation" of certain rumours might anticipate the story's concern about Somebody's response to the circulation of his stories without his permission. Christopher demonstrates the power of rumour to undermine the separation of public and private personae in his anecdote about "OLD CHARLES" (also known as John, which was Dickens's father's name and his own middle name), "by some considered the Father of the Waitering" (3), who adopted an ostentatious demeanour to live up to the rumour about Head Waiters. He accomplished this with such success that he convinced his own wife who, widowed and living in an alms-house, "expects John's hoarded wealth to be found hourly!" (3). By playing with his own name, and perhaps on the character of his father, whose eloquence and self-presentation belied his means, Dickens draws a comic parallel between the world of the text and the real world of the author that the story declines to deny, confirm, or even elaborate on.<sup>126</sup> This story, styled partly as a biography, is concerned with rumour, false impressions, and with the dangers of public exposure. In his decision to sell the writings Christopher explains "I had not thought of the risk I ran, and the defying publicity I put my head into, until all was done" (46). The phrase "defying publicity" contains a double sense: it describes the danger of publicity, but also indicates the act of evading it. Indeed, in the early 1860s, following the public drama of his separation, and with his relationship with Ellen Ternan rumoured, the notions of both exposure and evasion may have had particularly personal resonance.

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<sup>125</sup> Kreilkamp, *Voice and the Victorian Storyteller*, 110.

<sup>126</sup> On Dickens's name, see Bowen, *Other Dickens*, 38; on John Dickens, see Slater, *Charles Dickens*, 8, 16-17.

There is a barely submerged current of anti-marriage sentiment running through Christopher's story, about a workplace where marriage is not permitted, where the secrecy required by the workplace makes women bad mothers, where huge financial misunderstandings occur between long-married couples, and where Christopher's father's dingy bachelor lifestyle is seen as attractively mysterious (2). In the course of the Number, Dickens refers to two literary men famous for their spectacular marital disasters – Bluebeard and Othello, both of whom murder their wives. In "His Brown-Paper Parcel," Tom's friend, Mr Click, who hopes one day to play the part of Othello, warns him "beware of envy. It is the green-eyed monster which never did and never will improve each shining hour, but quite the reverse" (32). The misquote reads like one of the intersecting phrases of the pavement artist's display. In the following phrase, "Hunger is a 0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 sharp thorn" (31), the numbers intrude upon the proverb, as if to remind the artist's audience of his depleting resources. Mr Click draws together Shakespeare's phrase about sexual jealousy from *Othello*, substituted by "envy" here, with a co-opted version of Isaac Watts' poem for children about industriousness, "How doth the little busy bee." The interruption of Shakespeare's famous quote by a poem which venerates hard work suggests that it is primarily professional rather than sexual jealousy which is at stake; although the fact that Tom's love interest elopes with the "Commercial character" at the end does nothing to help his demeanour "improve." Moreover, the Watts poem attaches itself to the phrase from Shakespeare at the point where "which doth mock / The meat it feeds on" would have been, in a way



which doesn't mock the original, but rather feeds off its fame and makes it comic.<sup>127</sup>

*Othello*, from which Dickens derived the subtitle for his second journal ("The story of our lives, from year to year"), and which he had written a burlesque of in 1833 entitled *O'Thello*, is also a play about living a double life, like the married waiter, or pavement artist, or Bluebeard.<sup>128</sup> Christopher is persuaded by the ladies to pay Somebody's bill and open his luggage, to satisfy their curiosity about its contents: "Miss Martin come round me, and Mrs Pratchett come round me, and the Mistress she was completely round me already, and all the women in the house come round me . . . . For what can you do when they do come round you?" (5). His unusual response to this female interference is to declare "[m]y family-name is Blue Beard. I'm going to open Somebody's Luggage all alone in the Secret Chamber, and not a female eye catches sight of the contents!" (5). Shuli Barzilai discusses references to Bluebeard in Dickens as moments of both revelation and concealment, which half express hostile feelings – particularly towards marriage and women – which would be unacceptable if more openly communicated.<sup>129</sup> As Tom unapologetically assumes the part of jealous Othello, Christopher identifies with Bluebeard, to avoid becoming a man amongst overbearing and meddling women. The story of Bluebeard is one that turns, of course, on female curiosity,

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<sup>127</sup> William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. Norman Sanders (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 131, lines 168–69.

<sup>128</sup> See Patten, *Charles Dickens and "Boz,"* 49.

<sup>129</sup> Shuli Barzilai, *Tales of Bluebeard and His Wives from Late Antiquity to Postmodern Times* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 29.

and though Christopher explicitly identifies with Bluebeard himself, he also plays the part of Bluebeard's wife. Opening up Somebody's luggage is parallel to entering the forbidden room. In this case, Christopher is not left with a stained key, but rather the insuppressible proof of his actions, in the publication of Somebody's works. The headless wife of Captain Murderer – the Bluebeard adaptation that Dickens was told as a child – becomes the headless writer of the manuscripts.<sup>130</sup>

Christopher's desire to tell, or perform, his tale of childhood suffering counterbalances the imperative to repress the details of domestic life. In Christopher's version of his childhood, Dickens plays out, in a comic vein, the self-dramatising nature that autobiography can take. After his father's death, Christopher was taken on "from motives of benevolence at the George and Gridiron [presumably a play on "Dragon"], theatrical and supper":

Here, supporting nature on what you found in the plates (which was as it happened, and but too often thoughtlessly immersed in mustard), and on what you found in the glasses (which rarely went beyond driblets and lemon), by night you dropped asleep standing, till you was cuffed awake, and by day was set to polishing every individual article in the coffee-room. Your couch being sawdust; your counterpane being ashes of cigars. Here, frequently hiding a heavy heart under the smart tie of your white neckankecher (or correctly speaking lower down and more to the left), you picked up the rudiments of knowledge from an extra, by the name of Bishops, and by calling plate-washer, and gradually elevating your mind with chalk on the back of the corner-box-partition, until such time as you used the inkstand when it was out of hand, attained to manhood and to be the Waiter that you find yourself. (2)

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<sup>130</sup> See Charles Dickens, "The Uncommercial Traveller: Nurse's Stories," in *The Uncommercial Traveller and Other Papers, 1859-70*, vol. 4 of *The Dent Uniform Edition of Dickens' Journalism*, ed. John Drew and Michael Slater (London: J. M. Dent, 2000), 169–80.

The coffee-room, that evocative site in Dickens's work, which he connected to his time working at Warren's Blacking factory, is the location for this story of a child with a vivid memory for food, drink, and smell; who is keenly aware of his mistreatment by his family, particularly his female relatives; who is forced to go to work; whose education is an afterthought, and conducted by an "extra."<sup>131</sup> Christopher's story both indulges a desire to seek recognition for past misery and to point out the guilty parties, particularly the women, and to satirise this desire at the same time; perhaps a private self-parody, or a half-conscious acknowledgment by Dickens of his own tendency to transform his experiences into both comedy and pathos. Christopher wants us to feel pity at the thought of his "innocent mind surrounded by uncongenial cruets, dirty plates, dish-covers, and cold gravy" (1), but Dickens wants us to laugh too. Indeed, that the fake artist in "His Brown-Paper Parcel" falsely claims that the portrait of a hermit is, "to a certain extent, a recollection of his father," to which a boy from the crowd irreverently asks whether the drawing of a pointer (a breed of dog) smoking a pipe is his mother (32), ridicules the sentimentality and sincerity of this kind of biographical gesture. Christopher's account of his cigar ash pillow and his diet of scraps and driblets, seems to embrace in style what Dickens claimed he had been so careful to avoid in his account of his life to Forster, when he said "I know I do not exaggerate, unconsciously and unintentionally, the scantiness of my resources and the difficulties of my life."<sup>132</sup> The framing material for *Somebody's Luggage* was indeed a "comic defiance" as Dickens described it, but in many

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<sup>131</sup> On the autobiographical fragment, see Bodenheimer, *Knowing Dickens*, 69.

<sup>132</sup> Forster, *Life*, 1873, 1:37.

different ways.<sup>133</sup> It is a comic defiance of a definitive model of authorship; of contributors' resistance to editorial control; and of the tiresome issues of copyright law. It is also perhaps a comic defiance of the obligations of family; of the need to hide the details of one's private life to sustain a career; of the private shock that runs through the body at the sight of the word "COFFEE ROOM" painted onto glass, viewed the wrong way round, and all the shame and resentment that goes with it.

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<sup>133</sup> Pilgrim, 10:129.

## Chapter 2 – Dickens’s Child Narrators (1852, 1853, 1866)

Feral orphans and runaway lovers, killer ghosts and guiding angels, rebellious schoolboys and lonely schoolgirls: children appear in a wide range of forms throughout the Christmas Numbers. Some of these children feel rather familiar: the lovely spirit of Procter’s “The Angel’s Story” (*ARS*), the little adults-in-training in Dickens’s “The Boots” (*HTI*), the ungrateful grown-up child of Gaskell’s “The Ghost in the Garden Room” (*THH*). Others, however, arrest our attention by becoming the tellers of their own stories. Dickens used a child narrator only four times in his career; three of these, “The Child’s Story” (*RS*), “The Schoolboy’s Story” (*ARS*), and “The Boy at Mugby” (*MJ*), were in the Christmas Numbers. The fact that Harriet Martineau’s “The Deaf Playmate’s Story” (*RS*) and Procter’s dramatic monologue “The Third Poor Traveller” (*SPT*) are both told from the perspective of a child, suggests that writers saw the Christmas Number as an opportunity to experiment with a technique that was still, at the time, rarely used.<sup>1</sup>

The Victorian period, Sally Shuttleworth has argued, saw the birth in Britain of earnest literary and scientific interest in child development. Mental health, sexuality, and education, among other things, became the subjects of novels and studies, particularly from the 1840s onwards, as authors and

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<sup>1</sup> Marah Gubar, *Artful Dodgers: Reconceiving the Golden Age of Children’s Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 39.

academics sought to understand and depict the child's mind.<sup>2</sup> Shuttleworth's *The Mind of the Child: Child Development in Literature, Science, and Medicine, 1840-1900*, adds to a decade of influential works by James Kincaid (1992), Jacqueline Rose (1994), Carolyn Steedman (1995), Catherine Robson (2001), and Judith Plotz (2001), whose diverse studies form a rich, but by now familiar, bibliography of the child and childhood in the Victorian period. It should come as no surprise that Dickens comes up to a greater or lesser degree in all of them. "Dickens" and "children" is, of course, a familiar pairing of terms, established through many years of critical work. But the very pervasiveness of the child in Dickens's work, or at least the deep investment in the subject amongst scholars of Dickens, occasionally means that the topic lends itself to generalisation. "We think of Dickens as a manufacturer of model children, pious little monsters, moribund and adult."<sup>3</sup> This statement by John Carey is rather close to Bret Harte's 1867 parody of Dickens's 1848 Christmas book, *The Haunted Man*, in which the exasperated narrator has a premonition of the contents of Dickens's most recent novel, which he holds in his hands:

"I see a child," said the Haunted Man, gazing from the pages of the book into the fire, – "a most unnatural child, a model infant. It is prematurely old and philosophic. It dies in poverty to slow music. It dies surrounded by luxury to slow music. It dies with an accompaniment of golden water and rattling carts to slow music. Previous to its decease it makes a will; it repeats the Lord's Prayer, it kisses the 'boofer lady.'"<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Sally Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child: Child Development in Literature, Science, and Medicine, 1840-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1–3.

<sup>3</sup> John Carey, *The Violent Effigy: A Study of Dickens' Imagination* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), 131.

<sup>4</sup> Harte, "The Haunted Man," 454.

This amalgamation of the famous child deaths of Paul Dombey, Jo the Crossing Sweeper from *Bleak House*, Johnny the orphan from *Our Mutual Friend*, and Little Nell from *The Old Curiosity Shop*, who thought she could hear music as she lay dying, speaks to certain salient features of Dickens's portrayals of children: the unusual maturity, the childish phonetics, the pressure of the fallen world of capitalism, the pull of the kingdom of heaven, the overwhelming presence of death. Harte takes pains to emphasise, just in case anybody misses the vital scene, as we do with poor Nell: "it dies." The child in Dickens's work is a polarising subject. Whereas some have been cringed at, and others had scorn poured upon them (Oscar Wilde's response to Nell's death is probably the most famous), others have gained the merit of being some of the most influential and psychologically perceptive portrayals of childhood of the period.<sup>5</sup> The variety might be broadly reflective of the "highly discrepant models of the child" that coexisted in the period: from innocent naïf to savage.<sup>6</sup> Within these mixed discourses, Dickens's choice of the child narrator can be seen as symptomatic of the way that the child's perspective and experience were gaining in prominence, and beginning to have a significant impact upon literary form and genre.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See Peter Coveney, *The Image of Childhood: The Individual and Society. A Study of the Theme in English Literature* (London: Penguin, 1967), 158; Angus Wilson, "Dickens on Children and Childhood," in *Dickens 1970: Centenary Essays*, ed. Michael Slater (London: Chapman and Hall, 1970), 201; Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, 107, 121.

<sup>6</sup> Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, 4; see also the introduction to Peter Merchant and Catherine Waters, eds., *Dickens and the Imagined Child* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2015), 5.

<sup>7</sup> Gubar, *Artful Dodgers*, 39.

Children, like texts, often trouble our attempts to explain them, or change with time and perspective into something new and strange. The textual child, it seems, is a particularly heavily invested figure: a complex accumulation of personal experience, ideology, social history, literary convention, and scientific investigation, among other things. But despite the critical interest in the interactions between adult writers and fictional children, and the years that critics have spent unravelling the various biographical, political, and social threads of Oliver, Pip, and David, the child narrator has been curiously overlooked as a formal category in Dickens's work. *Holiday Romance*, published simultaneously in *All the Year Round* and an American children's weekly magazine in 1868, is usually recognised as his only example of this technique.<sup>8</sup> Traditionally, *Holiday Romance* has singularly failed to charm critics of Dickens, but more recently its critical fortunes have been turning around.<sup>9</sup> Paul Schlicke refers to the story when he states that in "no respect is [Dickens] more innovative than in his capacity to represent the child's point of view in fiction."<sup>10</sup> Claudia Bacile di Castiglioni refers to Dickens's "great innovation" with the story in casting off the stultifying tones of didactic children's literature and instead "writing for children through their language."<sup>11</sup> In her study of the Victorian child narrator, Marah Gubar recognises *Holiday Romance* as part of a new era of

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<sup>8</sup> See the introduction to Charles Dickens, *Holiday Romance and Other Writings for Children*, ed. Gillian Avery (London: K. M. Dent, 1995), xxiv.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas, *Dickens and the Short Story*, 125.

<sup>10</sup> Schlicke, *Oxford Reader's Companion*, 94.

<sup>11</sup> Claudia Bacile di Castiglioni, "Holiday Romance: Children's Dreams of Omnipotence in Dickens's Last Fiction," in *Dickens: The Craft of Fiction and the Challenges of Reading*, ed. Rossana Bonadel et al. (Milan: Unicopoli, 2000), 154.



“Golden Age” fiction for children, which she claims often distanced itself from the preoccupation with the child as either passive victim or reified Other, and presented child narrators as savvy, self-aware storytellers, who were actively involved in negotiating the social, cultural, and literary codes imposed upon them by adults.<sup>12</sup> Gubar suggests that the choice of a child narrator was still “daringly experimental” in the 1850s and 1860s, when Dickens was using the technique. Yet despite her complaint that the child narrators of this period have “received virtually no critical attention,” partly due to the fact that “commentators are working with a radically incomplete genealogy,” she entirely omits Dickens’s Christmas Number child narrators from her account.<sup>13</sup>

Dickens’s child narrators are the meeting point between his experiments with the first-person form and the emotionally freighted, complex, and varied figure(s) of the child in his fiction. For all the critical recognition that the voice and perspective of the child were achieving new prominence in the Victorian era, Dickens’s experiments with a technique that brings these elements to the forefront are still relatively unknown. The technique undergoes a remarkable development across his three uses of it in the Numbers, over the span of fourteen years. The first child narrator can be read as a negotiation of familiar tropes which celebrated the child’s imagination and intuitive wisdom, against the emerging psychological imperative to explore in a genuine way the child’s voice and perspective; the second plays with the schoolboy codes which were to underpin a genre that was on the cusp of being born; and the third, by far the

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<sup>12</sup> Gubar, *Artful Dodgers*, 7.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 39–40.

most astonishing of his child narrators, portrays the railway junction from the eye-level of a working child, which takes Dickens back to the theatrical spectacle of parliament, and the beginnings of his writing career.

Focusing on Dickens's child narrators demonstrates the kind of experimentation that the brief space of the Christmas Number enabled. But it is also integral to a full picture of Dickens's portrayal of the child and of the Victorian child narrator more generally, which is still incomplete. Indeed, with a collection of essays published earlier this year entitled *Dickens and the Imagined Child*, (which overlooks the child narrator), this is clearly an area of criticism which continues to be deeply relevant to the study of Dickens, and to grow.

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Dickens's first child narrator appears in 1852, only a couple of years after he finished work on his "favourite child," *David Copperfield*, his first novel to use a first-person narrator, since the failed attempt of *The Old Curiosity Shop*.<sup>14</sup> "The Child's Story" is an allegory about ageing, memory, and death, told by a nameless child narrator, of no specified gender. In it, the Child describes a traveller on a "magic" (5) journey through a forest, who meets a male figure at successive stages of his life, from early childhood to old age. The traveller follows his progress, through courtship, marriage, and loss. The final image of the story is one of recuperation: through memory, the old man is able to recover both the

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<sup>14</sup> This well-known phrase is from Dickens's 1867 preface to the novel. See, for example, Schlicke, *Oxford Reader's Companion*, 150.

people who had died before him (his child and wife), and his own past selves. The story is elegiac in tone, delicately transposing shades of sadness and comfort, loss and memory, and seeming to be both a story about death and the end of death. It bears the inflections of the overlapping notions of childhood in the mid-nineteenth century: in particular, the influence of Romanticism and the increasing interest in the individual child's perspective. Indeed, the narration is poised between the singularity of the Child's voice, driven by the energies of personal experience, and a more conventional idiomatic register, one which evokes, rather than wholeheartedly embraces, well-known paradigms inherited from Wordsworth and others, in particular, the child's isolation from society, a strong connection to nature, and a sense of intuitive wisdom.<sup>15</sup>

At a first glance, "The Child's Story" could be overlooked as a slight and sentimental story, not even covering two full pages in periodical layout. It might be read as a fantasy, even an indulgence, on the part of an author who seeks to cancel loss (Dickens had recently lost his infant daughter Dora and his father) by reassuring himself in the Child's earnest and hopeful tones.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, critics Judith Plotz, Jacqueline Rose, and most controversially James Kincaid, have placed the imperatives of adult desire firmly at the centre of their investigations of Victorian portrayals of childhood.<sup>17</sup> But it also can (and should) be read as the expression of an author who is seeking an innovative new form and perspective

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<sup>15</sup> Judith Plotz, *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 5.

<sup>16</sup> Slater, *Charles Dickens*, 353.

<sup>17</sup> Plotz, *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood*, xii; Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan or the Impossibility of Children's Fiction*, Revised Edition (London: the Macmillan Press Ltd, 1994), 2; James R. Kincaid, *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 4.

through which to explore the relationship between childhood and adulthood. It is a clear departure from the didactic poem “Old Age,” from a popular collection (1804-5) by Jane and Ann Taylor and others, in which an adult persona addresses a young child about the inevitability of death, by comparing the child’s body to the old man’s:

Those limbs, which so actively play,  
That face beaming pleasure and mirth,  
Like his must fall into decay,  
And moulder away in the earth.<sup>18</sup>

The story is not obviously moralistic, nor is it obviously for children; indeed, the title implies the inherent ambiguity of the writing, the tone of which seems to tread a line between a tale *by* and *for* children.

Critics have noted the shifting dynamics between the adult narrators and child characters in *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, which create rich interplays of experience and memory, perception and hindsight.<sup>19</sup> The absence of an explicit adult consciousness in “The Child’s Story” means that there is no such obvious interplay intended in the narrative. Nevertheless, the language and tone of the narrating voice is not entirely consistent or stable; rather, the Child’s narrative shifts subtly between different registers, without overtly calling

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<sup>18</sup> Ann Taylor and Jane Taylor, “Old Age,” in *Original Poems for Infant Minds* (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1881), 35–36. Although they are not listed on this edition, other contributing authors to this collection were Rev Isaac Taylor and Isaac Taylor Junior, Adelaide O’Keeffe, and Bernard Barton; see Joanne Shattock, ed., *The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, vol. 4, 1800-1900 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 467-68.

<sup>19</sup> For example, see Mary Galbraith, “Pip as ‘Infant Tongue’ and as Adult Narrator in Chapter One of *Great Expectations*,” in *Infant Tongues: The Voice of the Child in Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Goodenough, Mark A. Heberle, and Naomi Sokoloff (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 125.

attention to those shifts, in a gentle oscillation which weaves together the Child's perceptions and vocabulary with more complex expressions, and with experiences – the pain of loss, the comfort of memory – associated with adulthood.<sup>20</sup> This mixture is not, I suggest, a failure on Dickens's part to render childhood subjectivity or a sentimental whim, but suggests a close and ongoing relationship between "adult" and "child" within the individual, rather than accepting them as secure categories, separated by time. Indeed, the "child" as a continuous part of adult existence is part of the story's consoling principle and, perhaps in part, the conditions under which the adult author was able to inhabit the Child's voice at all.

Dickens constructs the Child's voice at the level of syntax, expression, grammar, and vocabulary. Everything is superlative: there were the "finest toys" and "most astonishing picture books" (5); they played "the merriest games that ever were played" (5) and eventually fell in love with "one of the prettiest girls that ever was seen" (6). Grammatical structuring is simple; paragraphs begin with "So," "But," or "Still," or the temporal markers "Sometimes," "Whenever," or "At last." Repetitive phrasing and simple or clichéd nouns evoke the child's limited stock of vocabulary. The description of the landscape where the traveller finds the child, in which "[t]he sky was so blue, the sun was so bright, the water was so sparkling, the leaves were so green, the flowers were so lovely" (5), contrasts with the relatively elaborate description of snow, "like down from the breasts of millions of white birds" (5). The echoing of the clauses evokes childish speech, but the picture it builds of an edenic natural scene calls up what Plotz

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<sup>20</sup> See Parker on the merging of adult and child perspectives in his sensitive discussion of "A Christmas Tree," in *Christmas and Charles Dickens*, 269–70.

has described as the identification of childhood with the natural realm, in one of the many Romantic discourses of childhood, in which the child is also seen as existing “outside the context of cultural institutions – of schools, of the state, and especially of their families.”<sup>21</sup> The narrative quickly shifts, however, away from a sense of seclusion to a description of the child’s books, a firm link to social life, which were

all about scimitars and slippers and turbans, and dwarfs and giants and genii and fairies, and blue-beards and bean-stalks and riches and caverns and forests and Valentines and Orsons: and all new and all true. (5)

The accumulative mode and use of conjunctives, and the sparing use of punctuation, not only create a child-like voice, but also create the excited sense that the narrator is using the materials of his or her own childhood to furnish this image (which as Glancy has pointed out, are also the books of Dickens’s childhood).<sup>22</sup> The immediacy of the child’s perspective is enhanced by the contrastingly spare description of adult life. The gentleman tells the traveller, “I am always busy” (6). Thereafter, instead of the breathless accumulation of images and ideas associated with the activity of the child and boy, the Child offers a vague and unspecified image of adult busyness: “[s]o, he began to be very busy with that gentleman, and they went on through the wood together” (6). Perhaps the author was imagining the view of his own children here, whose father was always novel-writing, Christmas story-writing, letter-writing, editing, acting, planning, speech-giving, household-organising.

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<sup>21</sup> Plotz, *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood*, 24–25.

<sup>22</sup> Glancy, “Dickens and Christmas,” 61.

Dickens's rendering of a child's voice is occasionally punctuated by language that appears to belong to a more mature consciousness. The opening lines of the story, which call up the classic temporal marker of children's fiction, set the tone for this close imbrication of child-like and mature registers:

Once upon a time, a good many years ago, there was a traveller, and he set out upon a journey. It was a magic journey, and was to seem very long when he began it, and very short when he got half way through. (5)

The syntax is very simple; it could suggest a story either by, or for, children. However, the extended metaphor of life as a "journey," and the joke about the shifting temporal perspective that comes with age in the second line, are indicative of an adult source. Additionally, the relatively more complex perspective of "was to seem" shifts out of the simple past tense to suggest something that has not yet taken place, but certainly will, with the quality of hindsight which, again, is suggestive of adult reasoning. The narrative is structured by a series of meetings, which are equally a series of losses. Occasionally, at these melancholic narrative junctures, a more complex expressive mode creeps in:

Still, one day, in the midst of all these pleasures, the traveller lost the boy as he had lost the child, and, after calling to him in vain, went on upon his journey. (6)

The measured punctuation and choice of phrasing, "in the midst" and "in vain," contrast with the simple vocabulary and sparseness of punctuation in the passages describing the games, books, and landscape. Again, as the traveller nears the end of his journey:

the traveller lost his friend. He called and called, but there was no reply, and when he passed out of the wood, and saw the peaceful sun going down upon a wide purple prospect, he came to an old man sitting on a fallen tree. (6-7)

The conjunctives here undergo a subtle modulation, from “called *and* called” to “*and* when he . . . *and* saw the,” the latter of which gives a sense of simultaneous action, rather than the endless accumulation of the child’s uninhibited descriptive mode. The figurative language of the “peaceful sun” and the symbolic “fallen tree,” which projects into the future to the old man’s death, just as it symbolises his experience of the deaths of others, suggests an adult consciousness, written with the softness that suggests an adult talking to a child. There is a tender poignancy to the fact that at these moments of loss and death, the weight of adult experience exerts a gentle pressure on the narrative and lightly urges it into these more mature cadences.

Loss is an important structural principle, but it is also part of the subject of the story, which describes the death of the man’s child, who “rose into the golden air and vanished” (6). Later, the traveller’s wife hears the voice of the child they had lost, and is herself “called” by death, down an avenue of trees, in the declining light of sunset:

Then, the mother, who was already drawn into the shade of the dark avenue and moving away with her arms still round his neck, kissed him, and said “My dearest, I am summoned and I go!” And she was gone. And the traveller and he were left alone together. (6)

This is nothing like the image of death that we get in the December instalment of *Bleak House* in 1852, where Krook spontaneously combusts, leaving nothing but a pungent “thick, yellow liquor,” a “stagnant, sickening oil,” covering the walls,



and a small burnt patch on the floor.<sup>23</sup> The Child's image trembles poignantly on the brink between metaphor and real experience; the image of the two figures left standing alone evokes, but does not attempt to negotiate, the painful complexities of adult loss. Nevertheless, the simple framing parts – “Then, the mother”/“And she was gone” – enclose a phrase of greater syntactical complexity, which includes the “dark avenue” image. The sense of anterior action (the mother was “already” drawn away) contrasts with the child's consecutive arrangement of the narrative in this passage with “Then,” the repeated conjunctives (“and said,” “And she,” “And the”), and the plainly stated conclusion. Indeed, the phrase “And she was gone” echoes the mother's phrase “and I go,” which could be seen to encapsulate the way that children absorb their language from adults. The linguistic mix of youth and age could be read as a tender echo of the embracing bodies it describes, or of the mother's reunion with her lost child. This phrase also recalls Nell, who asked for a final kiss and died embracing her grandfather, “with both her arms about his neck”;<sup>24</sup> who was also *already* gone by the time we experience and mourn her death, as was little Dora Dickens, whose death in 1851 was revealed to her father by Forster only after he had finished giving a speech at a dinner. Dickens in turn wrote to Catherine that she was only gravely ill, so that he could tell her the terrible news in person.<sup>25</sup>

In contrast to what has often been seen as an obsession with the child's innocence and his or her absolute detachment from the sexual lives of adults, the

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<sup>23</sup> Dickens, *Bleak House*, 516.

<sup>24</sup> Charles Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, ed. Norman Page (London: Penguin, 2000), 541.

<sup>25</sup> Pilgrim, 6:353. See also footnote 3 on same page.

persona of the Child narrator in this story is not constructed in opposition to, or outside of, adult sexuality.<sup>26</sup> “The Child’s Story” touches upon the dawning of sexual awareness, as the figure the traveller meets goes from “always learning” (5) to “always in love” (6). The Child, too, is keenly aware of adult sexuality and draws energy from the display and performance of courtship by his/her older relatives. The narrator refers to Fanny, perhaps a sister (Dickens, of course, had a sister called Fanny, who died in 1848)<sup>27</sup> who is part of the assembled family group, and her suitor who is also present, whom the Child likens to the fictional “young man” of the story:

So, the young man fell in love directly – just as Somebody I won’t mention, the first time he came here, did with Fanny. Well! He was teased sometimes – just as Somebody used to be by Fanny; and they quarrelled sometimes – just as Somebody and Fanny used to quarrel; and they made it up, and sat in the dark, and wrote letters every day, and never were happy asunder, and were always looking out for one another and pretending not to, and were engaged at Christmas time, and sat close to one another by the fire, and were going to be married very soon – all exactly like Somebody I won’t mention, and Fanny! (6)

As with the ending, when the child directly addresses his/her grandfather, here s/he breaks the distancing allegorical mode and tone, and a conventional and sometimes predictable idiom gives way to more individual nuances of character, and a type of allusion that is teasing and pointedly, knowingly, indirect. The expressive elements of the Child’s voice, the animated “Well!” and lack of inhibition, convey a vivid sense of this individual child’s personality, just as s/he flits momentarily out of the imagined story to reflect on his/her own experiences of watching adult behaviour, with a child’s delight in the strangeness of adult, or

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<sup>26</sup> On sexuality, see for example Kincaid, *Child-Loving*, 6–7.

<sup>27</sup> See Glancy’s introduction to Dickens, *The Christmas Stories*, xxv.

at least adolescent, courtship. This moment of playfulness gently satirises the “pretending” adults. Indeed, the act of storytelling itself requires a level of knowingness and performance, which diverges from the earnestness and melancholic strain of the story as a whole. Metaphor, which is typical of the fairy-tale genre, which the Child’s story, beginning “once upon a time” partly approximates, cannot completely contain the Child’s voice.

Critics have repeatedly wondered what kinds of adult desire might lurk behind fictional portrayals of children. According to Kincaid it might be just about anything, because the ideal child’s innocence and purity make it a blank “location we can dump all manner of lies, displacements, longings, hatreds, hypocrisies, and denials.”<sup>28</sup> In the case of “The Child’s Story,” the child narrator’s relationship to allegory is not merely a case of echoing the register of stories frequently told to children by adults, it is as a conduit of a desire to believe in a world where nothing is ever really lost; a belief in which early life and the afterlife achieve a strange equivalence, as memory has equal power to recall past selves and the dead. The Child’s narrative, under careful consideration, is less like a dumping ground of sentimental wishfulness (although it could arguably strike this chord at a glance), and more a subtle negotiation with the question of selfhood, identity, and change. The development of the central male figure is emphasised through the phrases “I am always at play,” “I am always learning,” “I am always in love,” and finally, “I am always remembering,” which imply something that both changes and stays the same.<sup>29</sup> This is the way Dickens

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<sup>28</sup> James R. Kincaid, “Dickens and the Construction of the Child,” in *Dickens and the Children of Empire*, ed. Wendy S. Jacobson (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), 30.

<sup>29</sup> See Merchant and Waters, *Dickens and the Imagined Child*, 7.

characterised selfhood in “The Story in Master B’s Room” for *The Haunted House*. The narrator describes himself as being conscious of “something within me, which has been the same all through my life, and which I have always recognised under all its phases and varieties as never altering” (28). By late in the century, it was widely believed that children possessed a limited capacity for temporal imagining because of their lack of accumulated experience, as Shuttleworth has demonstrated.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, the child narrator in this story appears to have intuited, in the figures of the traveller and the figures he meets, which encode both constancy and change, what Dickens expresses more explicitly about the self in *The Haunted House*; that is, the essential connectedness of the self at all stages through life.

“The Child’s Story,” then, implies that the child self is a continuous and accessible part of mature subjectivity. The final paragraph reads:

So, the traveller sat down by the side of that old man, face to face with the serene sunset; and all his friends came softly back and stood around him. The beautiful child, the handsome boy, the young man in love, the father, mother, and children: every one of them was there, and he had lost nothing. So, he loved them all, and was kind and forbearing with them all, and was always pleased to watch them all, and they all honoured and loved him. And I think the traveller must be yourself, dear Grandfather, because this is what you do to us, and what we do to you. (7)

The regular intervals in which the traveller loses his companions read, in retrospect, like the *fort-da* game described by Sigmund Freud, in which a child stages the loss and rediscovery of his toy, which Freud interprets as his attempt to gain mastery over the real experience of loss that he can’t control, namely, the

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<sup>30</sup> Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, 181, 16.

temporary absences of his mother.<sup>31</sup> The Child's act of storytelling revives and kills, but it concludes with an emphasis upon the old man's mastery over loss through the recuperative strategies of memory. But it is something stronger than memory, for he had "lost nothing"; an expression which seems both to posit the unity of the self, and the possibility of overcoming the separation of death.<sup>32</sup> The shadow of death and the phrase "dear Grandfather" echo Little Nell, once again, and connect the Child's story to another allegory about love and loss, knowledge and innocence, which follows a pair of travellers wandering through the woods.<sup>33</sup> The figure of the little girl, Catherine Robson has argued, was often regarded as the epitome of childhood, and for many middle-class male authors, the key to unlocking their own past selves.<sup>34</sup> Though the Child narrator remains essentially genderless, the subtle connection to Nell carries with it the emotive force of that female child, in a scene in which a child reaffirms for an old man, at the end of his life, that nothing is ever truly lost.

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<sup>31</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*, ed. Mark Edmundson, trans. John Reddick (London: Penguin, 2003), 52–54.

<sup>32</sup> See Bodenheimer, *Knowing Dickens*, 58.

<sup>33</sup> Glancy links this instead to Master Humphrey, in "Dickens and Christmas," 61.

<sup>34</sup> Catherine Robson, *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 3.

By the following year, 1853, Dickens's rhetorical strategy for conveying the child's perspective had already significantly evolved, alongside a shift of location from a familial to an educational setting.<sup>35</sup> The school story provides the most significant context for the emergence of the child narrator. *Mrs Leicester's School* (1809) by brother and sister Charles and Mary Lamb, is a didactic collection, in which a circle of female school friends take it in turn to tell their story. The Lambs' stories drew upon an Evangelical model of childhood that posited the inherent sinfulness of the child. One narrator muses that "[i]t must have been because I was never spoken to at all, that I forgot what was right and what was wrong," which foreshadows Dickens's Miss Kimmeens (*TTG*) whose thoughts quickly become morbid and rancorous when she is left alone at boarding school for a day during the holidays.<sup>36</sup> Beverly Lyon Clarke has pointed out that the framework of the Lamb's collection is reminiscent of Sarah Fielding's *The Governess* (1749), a series of stories told by a group of young ladies at a boarding school; a format which had already been repeated in Richard Johnson's *Little Female Orators; or, Nine Evenings Entertainment* (1770).<sup>37</sup> Martineau's story

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<sup>35</sup> The *DJO* version of volume 8 of *Household Words* (1853-54), which contains this Christmas Number, is a version printed in New York by McElrath and Barker. There are some minor textual variations between this text and the original text used to prepare the Everyman edition of *The Christmas Stories*. For consistency, I will cite the version provided by *DJO*.

<sup>36</sup> Charles Lamb and Mary Lamb, *Mrs Leicester's School* (Poole: Woodstock Books, 1995), 102.

<sup>37</sup> Beverly Lyon Clarke, *Regendering the School Story: Sassy Sissies and Tattling Tomboys* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 29.

from 1852 about the deaf playmate is also set primarily at school. Isabel Quigly reiterates the general consensus that the canonical school story genre was “born” with Thomas Hughes’s *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*, published in 1857.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, Dickens’s “The Schoolboy’s Story” precedes Hughes’s story by several years, and has significant elements in common with it: in particular, a concern with money and class, with resisting oppression and authority, and with the importance of schoolboy codes of honour and loyalty, which came to be a hallmark of the genre.

“The Schoolboy’s Story” has, in effect, two layers of plot. The principal storyline involves a former pupil, Old Cheeseman, who finds himself persecuted by a group of peers after he is promoted to second Latin Master. In a reversal of the usual pattern of terrifying teachers (Squeers, M’Choakumchild, and Bradley Headstone, to name a few), Old Cheeseman’s advancement is interpreted as a cynical betrayal by his former friends, who establish a Society in opposition to him, led by first boy, Bob Tarter, whose “father was in the West Indies, and he owned, himself . . . was worth Millions” (2). The secondary plot fills in Old Cheeseman’s secret history. Much like *Oliver Twist*’s mother, Old Cheeseman’s mother came from a wealthy family, but her choice of lover led to her estrangement and early death. As the Schoolboy puts it, Old Cheeseman

was the orphan child of a disinherited young lady who had married against her father’s wish, and whose young husband had died, and who had died of sorrow herself, and whose unfortunate baby (Old Cheeseman) had been brought up at the cost of a grandfather who would never consent to see it, baby, boy, or man . . . (3)

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<sup>38</sup> Isabel Quigly, *The Heirs of Tom Brown: The English School Story* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1982), 42.

Like *Oliver Twist*, “The Schoolboy’s Story” is a mix of genres. It has all the material for a rags-to-riches novel: an orphan protagonist, a mother who married for love and died of sorrow, a vindictive grandfather, a withheld inheritance, a love interest, and a jubilant ending where everyone gets what they deserve, and the hero regains, as Oliver does, the social standing that was rightfully his all along. It is a school story, written before the period’s most enduring tale of that genre, which is told from the point of view of a pupil, rather than through the distancing lens of an adult narrator as in *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*.<sup>39</sup> It also teeters on the edge of allegory: the names Old Cheeseman and Bob Tarter call up, respectively, the many children in Dickens whose suffering makes them prematurely old, and the notorious “Tartar” warriors of Genghis Khan, which was absorbed into the language as a term of opprobrium.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, Emma Lirriper’s grandson Jemmy says, of his schoolmaster, “O, he WAS a Tartar! Keeping the boys up to the mark, holding examinations once a month, lecturing upon all sorts of subjects at all sorts of times, and knowing everything in the world out of book” (47, *Lodgings*).

However, the story is never fully subsumed into the modes of metaphor and symbol because of the tone of the Schoolboy’s narration. Victorian experts worried about what it might mean for a child to know too much.<sup>41</sup> Procter’s

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<sup>39</sup> Galbraith examines the relationship between adult narrator and child consciousness in “Pip as ‘Infant Tongue,’” 123; see also James Phelan, *Living to Tell About It: A Rhetoric and Ethics of Character Narration* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), e.g. 70–71.

<sup>40</sup> “Tartar,” entry 2, definitions 1 and 2c, *Oxford English Dictionary*, web, March 2015.

<sup>41</sup> On forced education and sexual knowledge see, for example, Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, 116–117, 210.



poem, "The Third Poor Traveller," about an orphan who is taken under the wing of a Countess, relies on the reader recognising what the orphan speaker is too young to comprehend; that the Countess is his mother, who gave him up as an infant in order to remarry after her husband's death. The technique, which emphasises the child's inability to decode the truth, means that the reader encounters this woman through the mediated view of the child's innocent pity. In Dickens's story for *Mrs Lirriper's Legacy*, Emma's adopted grandson also unknowingly comes face to face with his father. Afterwards he tells Emma and her long-term lodger, Jemmy Jackman, "Mr Edson's story," which at first seems to suggest that he has intuited the connection between them. However it quickly becomes clear, Emma reports, "that the dear boy had no suspicion of the bitter truth" (48, *Legacy*). Bodenheimer has explored Dickens's portrayal of "fluid" states of knowledge: the spaces between knowingness and innocence, between something partially or unconsciously known, and the denial of knowledge or refusal to know.<sup>42</sup> These liminal epistemological states are perhaps especially relevant to the schoolchild. The school itself can be seen as a particularly liminal place, one that is between family and society, and whose residents are in a state of "becoming" between childhood and adulthood.<sup>43</sup> The Schoolboy's narrative opens with the statement "[b]eing rather young at present – I am getting on in years, but still I am rather young – I have no particular adventures of my own to

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<sup>42</sup> Bodenheimer, *Knowing Dickens*, 6. On these issues in *Holiday Romance*, see Thomas, *Dickens and the Short Story*, 124-25; see also Robert Newsom, "Fictions of childhood," in *The Cambridge Companion to Charles Dickens*, ed. John O. Jordan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 98-99. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521660165.008>.

<sup>43</sup> Lyon Clarke, *Regendering the School Story*, 7.

fall back upon" (1). He understands himself as both young and old at the same time, and his candid claim to inexperience is framed in language that expresses a sense of self-awareness of himself as a storyteller and his audience. Indeed his language generally treads the boundary of a knowing and facetious carelessness, and earnest childish candour.

Thomas has described the Schoolboy's narrative as "unremarkable."<sup>44</sup> On the contrary, the story contains a shrewd portrayal of the dynamics of childhood that undoes the typical binaries that often characterise the discussion of children and adults: power and powerlessness, guilt and innocence, experience and naivety, knowledge and ignorance. This is not a challenge to the power/powerless binary after the manner of Kincaid, who suggests that the inverse is often the case: that the child is often equipped with and fully aware of his or her own "considerable arsenal."<sup>45</sup> Rather, in the Schoolboy's narrative, the schoolboys mimic structures of power from adult life, and the narrator is repeatedly drawn to the idea of social power and powerlessness, without necessarily possessing a full understanding of it. Writing about Henry James's *What Maisie Knew*, Shuttleworth suggests that "James's model of mind is . . . one where all experience is absorbed but generally held suspended, outside the realm of comprehension."<sup>46</sup> The tone of the Schoolboy's narrative is usually one of comic, matter-of-fact detachment, which indicates his estrangement from the

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<sup>44</sup> Thomas, *Dickens and the Short Story*, 81.

<sup>45</sup> Kincaid, *Child-Loving*, 24.

<sup>46</sup> Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, 328.

broader societal implications of the story he is telling: about power, gender, money, class exclusion, and oppression.

He was first brought there, very small, in a post-chaise, by a woman who was always taking snuff and shaking him – and that was the most he remembered about it. He never went home for the holidays. His accounts . . . were sent to a Bank, and the Bank paid them; and he had a brown suit twice a year, and went into boots at twelve. They were always too big for him, too. (1)

The Schoolboy is drawn to the material details, the snuff, the brown suit, the ill-fitting shoes, without expanding into the more complex social and cultural implications of this web of details. None of these items belong to the metaphoric register of the child's fairy-tale; rather, they comprise a metonymy of social truths outside the narrator's comprehension. Consequently, the Schoolboy is both inside and outside the storytelling conventions he employs, just as Old Cheeseman is both insider and outsider at the same time. The mix of genres and carefully handled technique, products of the adult author rather than the child narrator, create a masterful blend of humour and sympathy, cruelty and pathos, presenting the child world as equally endowed with the conflicts, prejudices, loyalties, and surprises, as the adult world; and the child as on the cusp of understanding those codes which he will one day fully inherit, knowing them without knowing it.<sup>47</sup>

For Tom Brown and company, schooling at Rugby involved trying to do as little Latin homework as possible. Indeed, according to the narrator, turning out "good English boys" is at least as important an objective as learning Latin and

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<sup>47</sup> On these issues in *Holiday Romance*, see Gubar, *Artful Dodgers*, 51–52.

Greek.<sup>48</sup> According to Forster, Dickens had learnt the rudiments of Latin from his mother, but as Patten shows, how far he was exposed to Latin and other formal subjects during his education is unclear.<sup>49</sup> In “Our School,” ostensibly an account of his own experiences, Dickens recalls his Latin master as an intelligent man who nevertheless “had the best part of his life ground out of him in a Mill of boys.”<sup>50</sup> In his novels, Latin as a subject is at the nexus point of the conflicting imperatives of the education of the young: the point at which education as aspiration, as class division, and as sadistic punishment, meet. David Copperfield offers to teach Uriah Heep Latin, but he declines, with characteristic false modesty, on account of being far too “umble” for such an education.<sup>51</sup> Mrs Blimber is shocked that little Paul Dombey knows no Latin grammar, and recoils at the name of Paul’s driver and hitherto unofficial teacher, “old Glubb,” which she considers “[u]nclassical to a degree!”<sup>52</sup> The exacting nature of the classical education at Doctor Blimber’s is highlighted by the fact that one of Paul’s fellow pupils “talked unknown tongues, or scraps of Greek and Latin – it was all one to Paul – which, in the silence of night, had an inexpressibly wicked and guilty

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<sup>48</sup> Thomas Hughes, *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*, ed. Andrew Sanders (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 1999), 63.

<sup>49</sup> Patten, *Charles Dickens and “Boz,”* 27; Forster, *Life*, 1873, 1:6; Schlicke, *Oxford Reader’s Companion*, 214.

<sup>50</sup> Charles Dickens, “Our School,” in *“Gone Astray” and Other Papers from Household Words, 1851-59*, vol. 3 of *The Dent Uniform Edition of Dickens’ Journalism*, ed. Michael Slater (London: J. M. Dent, 1998), 41.

<sup>51</sup> Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 263–64.

<sup>52</sup> Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son*, ed. Andrew Sanders (London: Penguin, 2002), 172.

effect.”<sup>53</sup> The depiction of Latin as a tool to punish schoolboys is reversed in “The Schoolboy’s Story.” Bob Tarter trains “a rosy cheeked little Brass who didn’t care what he did” to interject insults into a recitation from his Latin grammar book:

*Nominativus pronominum* – Old Cheeseman, *raro exprimitur* – was never suspected, *nisi distinctionis* – of being an informer, *aut emphasis gratia* – until he proved one. *Ut* – for instance, *Vos damnastis* – when he sold the boys, *Quasi* – as though, *dicat* – he should say, *Pretœrea nemo* – I’m a Judas! (2)

Jacqueline Rose has located what she sees as the crucial problem that underpins children’s fiction, that is, the question of what adults might want or need from children’s literature, in the medium of that literature itself. Language is not a pure, unmediated tool of communication, but is subject, amongst other things, to the strictures of the school system itself.<sup>54</sup> The boys disrupt the deployment of classical education as an expression of adult authority, just as the Schoolboy narrator’s retrospective description of that disruption resists the tradition of didactic, moral storytelling associated with children’s literature, by failing to condemn the boys in their actions, and silently inviting laughter instead.

Henry Spicer’s contribution for *Mrs Lirriper’s Legacy* also begins as a school story, with an account of tyrannical schoolmasters and terrible school meals: day-old joints of mutton, “seamed with red murderous streaks,” and beef-steak pie that contains an assortment of inedible objects, including part of “an ancient dog-skin glove” and a pair of snuffers (25).<sup>55</sup> Dickens’s Schoolboy gives a

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 180–82.

<sup>54</sup> Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan or the Impossibility of Children’s Fiction*, 7.

<sup>55</sup> *DJO* acknowledge that Spicer’s story is missing from the hard copy edition of vol. 12 of *All the Year Round* that they have included on their website. As such, I

similar account of the offerings at his school: “[a]s to the beef, it’s shameful. It’s *not* beef. Regular beef isn’t veins,” he complains. Of the pie-crust, he remarks “[t]here’s no flakiness in it. It’s solid – like damp lead” (1). It is fitting, then, that the boys and Old Cheeseman become reconciled over a feast, of “[f]owls, tongues, preserves, fruits, confectionaries, jellies, neguses, barley-sugar temples, trifles, crackers – eat all you can and pocket what you like” (4). There is a serious point behind the Schoolboy’s grievance that “our fellows get their constitutions destroyed for the sake of profit” (1); that is, that children are not free from the protocols of the profit-driven world of capitalism, even before their full entry into society. Like Emma Lirriper’s adopted grandson Jemmy, the Schoolboy and his peers are acutely conscious of money.<sup>56</sup> The Schoolboy is outraged that one of his schoolfellows was “charged in his half’s account twelve and six-pence for two pills – tolerably profitable at six and three-pence a-piece, I should think – and he never took them either, but put them up the sleeve of his jacket” (1). Money dominates the terms in which he describes Old Cheeseman’s perceived treachery. Old Cheeseman was believed to have, in a phrase adapted from *Julius Caesar*, “coined [their] blood for drachmas” (2), or put another way, to have “sold himself for very little gold – two pound ten a quarter, and his washing, as was reported” (2). The narrator speculates about the financial situation of the school maid, Jane, who “stopped at so much a year. So little a year, perhaps I ought to say, for it is far more likely. However, she had put some pounds into the Savings’ Bank, and she was a very nice young woman” (2). After Old Cheeseman comes

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have consulted a complete hard copy of the original volume. A full reference is given in the bibliography.

<sup>56</sup> This is also the case for the children recounted in Dickens’s sketch about school life. See Dickens, “Our School,” 38.

into his inheritance, they guess that he will “make Jane a present of from five to ten pounds” (3) for her loyalty and, when she mysteriously vanishes, they speculate that she had been either “sent away in disgrace for taking money from Old Cheeseman,” or that she had gone into his service at “a rise of ten pounds a year” (4). After Old Cheeseman’s disappearance from school, in the midst of the Society’s campaign, some of the boys thought that Bob had better make his escape to the forest, “but the majority believed that if he stood his ground, his father – belonging, as he did, to the West Indies, and being worth millions – could buy him off” (3). Towards the end of his story the Schoolboy mentions that Bob’s father “wasn’t worth anything. Bob had gone for a soldier, and Old Cheeseman had purchased his discharge” (4).

Malcolm Andrews has described the Dickensian Christmas as “[e]galitarian, unifying and rejuvenating,” an opportunity to overcome the differences of age and class in “an age of proliferating class divisions.”<sup>57</sup> Rather than eliding social difference, Dickens’s child narrators, the Schoolboy and the Boy at Mugby, reinforce the cultural obsession with class and with money, as two of its most obvious markers. The Schoolboy is instinctively drawn to the manifestation of power and powerlessness. Instead of inheriting his grandfather’s wealth, Old Cheeseman seems to inherit his mother’s powerlessness, and the subjection of his mother in the melodramatic backstory finds an echo in his victimisation in the school plot. After Old Cheeseman is made master, the “Reverend turned up his nose at him” as he does “at all the masters” (2). But even before then, the

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<sup>57</sup> Malcolm Andrews, *Dickens and the Grown Up Child* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994), 99.

Schoolboy's account of Old Cheeseman's childhood underlines the raw caprices of schoolboy politics:

So Old Cheeseman went on. The holidays brought him into other trouble besides the loneliness; because when the fellows began to come back, not wanting to, he was always glad to see them: which was aggravating when they were not at all glad to see him, and so he got his head knocked against walls, and that was the way his nose bled. But he was a favourite in general. Once, a subscription was raised for him; and, to keep up his spirits, he was presented before the holidays with two white mice, a rabbit, a pigeon, and a beautiful puppy. Old Cheeseman cried about it, especially soon afterwards, when they all ate one another. (1)

The facetious tone of the final line captures perfectly the insouciant cruelty of boyhood, where Old Cheeseman is both victim and favourite; an object of ire and of charity. In Dickens's writing school pets often act as a reminder of the brutality of school experiences. In "Our School" Dickens recalls a "baleful" pug dog, as well as a white mouse who "lived in the cover of a Latin dictionary" and performed all manner of tricks, until meeting its end in a "deep inkstand" where it was "dyed black and drowned."<sup>58</sup> David Copperfield recalls a pair of "miserable little white mice," and a bird in a cage which is too small, who "makes a mournful rattle" but "neither sings nor chirps."<sup>59</sup> Striking quite a different tone, Martineau's child narrator recalls that he had broken the neck of his pet dove in frustration when he could no longer hear it coo (29, *RS*). Indeed, the response of the deaf playmate's peers to his increasing deafness, which is to suspect him of sulking, and to resent the seemingly preferential treatment he receives, offers a more sober context for this display of youthful inconsistency.

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<sup>58</sup> Dickens, "Our School," 36, 40.

<sup>59</sup> Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 89.



The adult narrator of *Tom Brown's Schooldays* provides a moralistic commentary upon the events described and, although Martineau's story is told from the perspective of a child, it contains a fairly explicit didactic strain, in that the child is encouraged to take his illness heroically, and to "arm himself with courage and patience" (30, *RS*).<sup>60</sup> Dickens's *Schoolboy's* narrative, in contrast, does not contain the instructive commentary of an implied adult consciousness.<sup>61</sup> The incongruity between the matter-of-fact tone and the pathos of some of the images heightens the impression of the boys' moral ambivalence. The Schoolboy reports that Old Cheeseman

had never had much hair; but what he had, began to get thinner and thinner every day. He grew paler and more worn; and sometimes of an evening he was seen sitting at his desk with a precious long snuff to his candle, and his hands before his face, crying. But no member of the Society could pity him, even if he felt inclined, because the President said it was Old Cheeseman's conscience. (2)

Bob Tarter had "great power" among the boys, much like the boy in Dickens's sketch "Our School," who was considered "too wealthy to be 'taken down.'"<sup>62</sup> In contrast to the influence of these young boys, Old Cheeseman

had only one friend in the world, and that one was almost as powerless as he was, for it was only Jane. Jane was a sort of

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<sup>60</sup> Mary Jo Deegan suggests Martineau "drew on all her adolescent experiences" in this story; see Deegan, "Making Lemonade: Harriet Martineau on Being Deaf," in *Harriet Martineau: Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives*, ed. Michael R. Hill and Susan Hoecker-Drysdale (New York: Routledge, 2003), 48.

<sup>61</sup> For a discussion of the implied author see James Phelan, "Unreliable Narration, Restricted Narration, and the Implied Author in Memoir: *Angela's Ashes* and (a Glance At) *'Tis*," in *Living to Tell About It: A Rhetoric and Ethics of Character Narration* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 66–97.

<sup>62</sup> Dickens, "Our School," 38.

wardrobe-woman to our fellows . . . . She come at first, I believe, as a kind of apprentice, some of our fellows say from a Charity, but *I* don't know . . . . (2)

The phrase “only Jane” is a clear intimation of the Schoolboy's perception of Jane's relative lack of importance, which he subtly adjusts with the less certain description of her “sort of”/“kind of” role, and finally disavows with the words “*I* don't know.” Bodenheimer has written recently that the “canny” child in Dickens is often the guilty keeper of knowledge that it shouldn't have; it “is not supposed to know what it knows.”<sup>63</sup> Indeed, the passage about Jane indicates a complex state of knowledge, in which his partial understanding of Jane's class position transforms into a reluctance to know, a hesitancy to commit into language what Estella feels no qualms about whatsoever when she refers to Pip as “Boy” and points out his coarse hands, thick boots, and the fact that he calls the knaves Jacks in cards.<sup>64</sup>

Across the nineteenth-century, school stories increasingly addressed the conflict between adult and child through the language of tale telling and rebellion.<sup>65</sup> In the school stories by Henry Spicer and Dickens, and in Hughes's *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, schoolboys are seen to form political or military style councils. When the school tyrant Flashman escalates his persecution of Tom Brown and his friends, they begin to hold “meetings of the oppressed,” where they laid “plots . . . as to how they should free themselves and be avenged on

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<sup>63</sup> Rosemarie Bodenheimer, “Dickens and the Knowing Child,” in *Dickens and the Imagined Child*, ed. Peter Merchant and Catherine Waters (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2015), 19.

<sup>64</sup> Dickens, *Great Expectations*, 60.

<sup>65</sup> Lyon Clarke, *Regendering the School Story*, 63.

their enemies.”<sup>66</sup> The schoolboys’ revenge against Old Cheeseman is framed in the military terminology of informers, deputations, interdicted communications, impeachment, coded records, and various forms of capital punishment and torture. The notion of staging a military coup is echoed in William Tinkling’s narrative in *Holiday Romance*. Having failed miserably in a mission to save his young bride from her schoolmistress, planned with militaristic accuracy “on a piece of paper which was rolled up round a hoop-stick” (400), Tinkling’s young bride writes him a scornful note accusing him of cowardice. He responds by demanding a trial by Court Marshall, to clear his name. The case against Tinkling is led by his “implacable enemy, the Admiral,” and he is marched into the court by “[t]wo executioners with pinafores reversed” (402). After Tinkling’s triumph, his enemy the Admiral has his mouth “filled with leaves, and tied up with string” (403) as a punishment for leading a witness. The vocabulary and syntax, for the most part, is far beyond an eight-year-old, in phrases such as “my peerless Bride” (399), “the first bewilderment of my heated brain” (400), and “[b]e still my soul” (402). Tinkling is undoubtedly a precocious reader; he uses the Latin term “Luna” (403) in place of “moon,” and his female friends are described as “Nymphs” (404). But his voice goes beyond mere precocity. It is a spectacular contrast of high rhetoric and childish actions and reasoning, which so humorously conveys, if not the child’s true way of speaking, then his absolute immersion in his own codes of honour; or as it has been perceptively described, a “queer combination of a child’s mind with a grownup joke.”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Hughes, *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*, 169; see also Quigly, *The Heirs of Tom Brown*, 43.

<sup>67</sup> Thomas, *Dickens and the Short Story*, 125.

The trope of telling tales became a prominent benchmark of the genre, which negotiated an individual's divided loyalty to their peers or to the greater cause of moral righteousness.<sup>68</sup> Even his silence fails to win Old Cheeseman credit with the Society, "because the President said it was Old Cheeseman's cowardice" (2). When the boys learn that Old Cheeseman, having received his inheritance, was to come back for a visit, they presume that his motive is revenge. Consequently, Bob spends "days and days . . . drawing armies all over his slate" (3), and proposes that they respond with "deadly resistance" (3). To that end, the boys fill their desks with rocks, and "[a] post about Old Cheeseman's size was put up in the playground, and all [the] fellows practised at it till it was dented all over" (3). The boys' scheme of punishment and retribution, quickly gives way when Old Cheeseman returns offering friendship, and the President bursts into remorseful tears. This isn't really a school story about good English boys, or teachers, or friendship; it is about the social systems that the school organisation reflects. Despite the boys' bullying, the story is not an attack on the perpetuation of inherited wealth and power; it merely sees that the money ends up in the hands of those who seem to deserve it. This is schoolboy justice, perhaps; but it also relates to the ongoing debate about how radical an author and a man Dickens was. Indeed, the school seems a particularly charged context, and the schoolboy a particularly relevant figure, for an author who railed against the status quo, without necessarily possessing the ability to effect change.

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<sup>68</sup> Lyon Clarke, *Regendering the School Story*, 77.

The ending of the story calls explicit attention to the question, once again, of what the Schoolboy knows. In the final line he declares “[s]o, now I have told you all I know about Old Cheeseman. And it’s not much after all, I am afraid. Is it?” (5). The reader is left to ponder the ambiguity of the final question: perhaps the Schoolboy is in earnest; perhaps it has been a more knowing performance than he admits. Perhaps he is even half-consciously telling a story about himself, for his family too had left him at school for the holidays and, he claimed, “rather low I was about it, I can tell you” (5). The Schoolboy’s self-awareness, and the location of his story within the realm of his immediate experience, paves the way for Dickens’s third child narrator, where the languages of politics and theatre converge, spectacularly, upon the figure of the working child.

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In December 1866, Dickens wrote to his old friend Thomas Beard about a mutual acquaintance from their parliamentary reporting days. Richard M. Bousfield, “who used to sit at the end of that blessed old Bench long burnt (Praise the Lord!)” had fallen on hard times, and an appeal had been made to Dickens on his behalf. Unable to shake the feeling that Bousfield had been a “bad subject altogether,” Dickens sought his friend’s advice. He signed the letter “THE BOY (AT MUGBY),” after the title character and narrator of one of his contributions to *Mugby Junction*, that year’s Christmas Number for *All the Year Round*, which had

been published a few days earlier.<sup>69</sup> As the connection implies, this late short story, set in the refreshment room at a fictional railway station, took Dickens back to his first scene of writing – the metropolitan parliamentary spectacle – and the idiom of the reporter who captures it. “The Boy at Mugby” is a raucous generic mix, a burlesque of myth, parliamentary rhetoric, and politics, told by a young boy employed in the refreshment room at Mugby Junction. Like Dickens’s “Barbox Brothers” stories, it includes fairy-tale elements: characters have inexplicably rhyming names (Mr and Mrs Sniff and the Misses Whiff and Piff) and the general public is cast ungenerously as the fairy-tale “Beast,” always hankering after its next meal. The Boy also calls up the phenomenon of child stage performers, which Dickens had satirised in *Nicholas Nickleby* in the “Infant Phenomenon” – a girl who had been aged ten for at least five years, and had been kept small on an “unlimited allowance of gin-and-water from infancy.”<sup>70</sup> Although the old bench was long burnt, many years later Dickens was still drawn to the boisterous theatrical energy of what Drew has described as the “primal scene of parliamentary debate.”<sup>71</sup> Dickens’s portrayal of the Boy resists Carolyn Steedman’s argument that in the nineteenth century, the child came to be seen as a figure for history and interiority.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, despite the connection to a specific

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<sup>69</sup> Pilgrim, 11: 283. Dickens also signed a letter to George Dolby as “the Boy”; see Pilgrim, 11:281. Thomas points out that he uses this signature, *Dickens and the Short Story*, 107.

<sup>70</sup> Charles Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby*, ed. Mark Ford (London: Penguin, 2003), 283.

<sup>71</sup> Drew, *Dickens the Journalist*, 38.

<sup>72</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780-1930* (London: Virago Press, 1995), 4.

aspect of Dickens's personal history, the era called upon is characterised by lively performative energy, which the Boy inhabits with a child's wicked delight.

George Dolby, the manager for Dickens's reading tours at this time, claimed that the inspiration for the story had been a real experience. After being scolded by a real Missis at Rugby Station, for helping himself to milk and sugar, Dickens had been mocked by a boy who was "so overjoyed" at witnessing his embarrassment that "he burst out into an uncontrollable fit of laughter."<sup>73</sup> Humiliating, certainly, for a well-known author, used to respect and adulation; but there was clearly something in the boy's inappropriate mirth that appealed to Dickens. The Artful Dodger in the courtroom in *Oliver Twist*; Trabb's boy publicly mocking Pip in *Great Expectations*; Lavinia Wilfer's disdain for her mother and everyone else in *Our Mutual Friend*; Deputy throwing stones in *Edwin Drood*: all are moments of irreverence, in which the disregard of the young for hierarchy, authority, and formality engenders vivacious comic energy in Dickens's work.<sup>74</sup>

The Boy's speech is characterised by misappropriations which reflect in a conventional sense his social status, but also go further to recreate the distinctive world of Mugby Junction. "Sandwiches" wilts into the less-than-appetising "sangwiches" (17), where the alternative first syllable suggests something disappointingly drooping; "tremendous" expands into "terrimenjious" (19), infusing the word itself with the excess of feeling that the Boy describes. The contortion of the latinate phrase "vice versa" into "Wicer Warsaw" (17) goes

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<sup>73</sup> Dolby, *Charles Dickens as I Knew Him*, 4:30–31.

<sup>74</sup> One reviewer saw the Boy at Mugby as closely related in spirit to Trabb's boy; see Collins, *Dickens: The Critical Heritage*, 420.

beyond the typical exchange of “w” and “v,” a vocal marker of his class; rather, he usurps and misuses the phraseology of the educated classes, in a passage which describes the way the ladies reverse the customary protocols of hospitality by rudely serving “stale pastry” and “sawdust sangwiches” to the “Beast,” with their noses automatically “a going up with scorn, as if it was a part of the working of the same Cooke and Wheatstone electrical machinery” (17) that telegraphed them for service. In the Boy, Dickens is not trying to inhabit a child’s consciousness in any conventional sense; rather, it is the perspective of this impish boy, whose education has been learned in the “Refreshmenting” business, peeking through cracks, watching unnoticed from above and below, enjoying the daily humiliations of the public whom the ladies irreverently refuse to serve, that we share. Indeed, what has been described as “the dangerous marginality of childhood,” indicated by the prevalence of abused and vulnerable child figures in Dickens, is here transformed into something very different.<sup>75</sup>

Alex Woloch has examined the paradoxical prominence of “minor” characters like Trabb’s boy in Dickens’s fiction, arguing that it is precisely their obscurity, their subordinate narrative and social position, that is the source of their affective power.<sup>76</sup> The Boy’s low social status and his marginal spatial positioning within the Refreshment room frame and energise his perspective. They also inject into it a brio of impertinent cheekiness, as if the acute angles of his vision – which doubtless gets the full effect of the ladies’ upturned noses –

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<sup>75</sup> Alexandra Johnson, “The Drama of Imagination: Marjorie Fleming and Her Diaries,” in *Infant Tongues: The Voice of the Child in Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Goodenough, Mark A. Heberle, and Naomi Sokoloff (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 84.

<sup>76</sup> Woloch, *One Versus the Many*, 178.



fuel his impertinent attitude. The rejection of subordinate positions and the deferential behaviour that goes with them gives charge to the dramatic encounters of the Boy's story. The "proudest boast" of the refreshment room, upheld with relish by the Boy, the young ladies, and the formidable Missis, is that it "never yet refreshed a mortal being" (17). If the archetypal Dickensian Christmas, *A Christmas Carol*, concludes with a grateful subordinate accepting a Christmas feast from his penitent master, then the Boy's narrative appears to be the subordinate's revenge. The scenario Dickens describes has the energy of carnival described by Mikhail Bakhtin: borne of the class system itself, carnival disrupts the social hierarchy by ending all "forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette connected with it."<sup>77</sup> The Boy and his colleagues embody a comic disruptive energy that is as hilarious to witness as it is disagreeable to fall victim to, as Dickens learned to his cost at Rugby station. Dickens would later tell Dolby that he had "taken a dislike" to the Boy, which he had converted into one of his public readings, claiming "I have too much Boy about me, altogether."<sup>78</sup> Perhaps he was thinking of his own boys all about him, whom he had written earlier that year had "so often disappointed [him]."<sup>79</sup> Or perhaps writing to an old friend from this era of his career, about a fellow journalist's financial disgrace, stirred the Boy in him. He may have been troubled about the ease with which he was able to identify with a waif of a young working boy with a penchant for

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<sup>77</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 123; on Bakhtin and Dickens's humour see Andrews, *Dickensian Laughter*, 101-2.

<sup>78</sup> Pilgrim, 12:179.

<sup>79</sup> Pilgrim, 11:150.

performing and poking fun at his social superiors. Safer, perhaps, to side with the wealthy middle-class author on the receiving end of the subordinate's revolt.

Bodenheimer has suggested that because of the closeness of the subject to his own "deeply held secret," Dickens "simply did not write about children who worked – as he had done – in nondomestic jobs for regular wages," with the exception of David Copperfield's stint at Murdstone and Grinby's warehouse.<sup>80</sup> This marks out the Boy as a significant exception.<sup>81</sup> Unlike the child narrators of "The Child's Story" and "The Schoolboy's Story," he is removed from the familiar cultural and institutional settings of home and school. His entrance into the public sphere instead in a sense restages (consciously or unconsciously), in defiant and exuberant style, the humiliating public spectacle described by Dickens in the famous autobiographical fragment of tying up blacking bottles by the factory window, in view of passers by.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, critics are often perhaps too ready to read Dickens's suffering children as a direct expression of his own experience, and less open to the potentially humorous creative transformations these experiences might have given rise to.<sup>83</sup> Far from resentful of his public performance, the Boy repeatedly demands our gaze from the very opening, only to continually evade it:

I am The Boy at Mugby. That's about what *I* am.

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<sup>80</sup> Bodenheimer, *Knowing Dickens*, 63.

<sup>81</sup> Christopher the waiter, too, had worked as a child, after his father's death (2, *SL*).

<sup>82</sup> Forster, *Life*, 1873, 1:48.

<sup>83</sup> See Wilson, "Dickens on Children and Childhood," 202; Coveney, *The Image of Childhood*, 111.

You don't know what I mean? What a pity! But I think you do. I think you must. Look here . . . .

Up in a corner of the Down Refreshment Room at Mugby Junction, in the height of twenty-seven cross draughts (I've often counted 'em while they brush the First Class hair twenty-seven ways), behind the bottles, among the glasses, bounded on the nor'-west by the beer, stood pretty far to the right of a metallic object that's at times the tea-urn and at times the soup-tureen, according to the nature of the last twang imparted to its contents which are the same groundwork,<sup>84</sup> fended off from the traveller by a barrier of stale sponge-cakes erected atop of the counter, and lastly exposed sideways to the glare of Our Missis's eye – you ask a Boy so sitiwated, next time you stop in a hurry at Mugby, for anything to drink; you take particular notice that he'll try to seem not to hear you, that he'll appear in a absent manner to survey the Line through a transparent medium composed of your head and body, and that he won't serve you as long as you can possibly bear it. That's Me. (17)

In his spirited way, the Boy gives us his own version of the opening of *Great Expectations*, in which he takes stock of his environment and his position within it, much as Pip had in the gloomy marshland. His opening gambit, "I am The Boy at Mugby. That's about what *I* am," decisively resists Pip's aporia of identity and naming. Indeed it is characteristic of Dickens that he should take these ideas so seriously in two of his other stories for *Mugby Junction*, "Barbox Brothers" and "Barbox Brothers and Co.," but dismiss them in the Boy's first line.

The Boy's position is at once privileged and restricted: "Up in a corner" suggests a marginal status at best, but "height" suggests a superior view, with the added advantage of watching the "First Class hair" get blown about; "bounded" suggests restriction, but "fended off" suggests protection.<sup>85</sup> His ambivalent

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<sup>84</sup> The *OED* gives a definition of "groundwork," in rare use, as the "principal ingredient in anything," entry 1, definition 3b, *Oxford English Dictionary*, web, March 2015.

<sup>85</sup> Christopher the Waiter is also "fended off up a step or two" in "the good old-fashioned style" with his directory and writing materials (3, *SL*).

position both of power and subordination is played out through a network of visual references: his injunction to the reader to “look here,” the disorienting directions (“Up,” “Down,” “behind,” “to the right”), the fierce “glare” of the Missis, characteristic of the way naughty children are held in view, and the performance of looking through the public, suggest that the power structure of the Refreshment room is defined and enacted through these crisscrossing channels of vision. Dickens redeploys this rigorous positioning to different effect in the subsequent story, “The Signalman.” It has been shown that in the first few paragraphs, the relative positions of the signalman and the narrator – “up,” “down,” “high above,” “down,” “height,” “down” (21-22) – embeds not only the difference in social status between the two men but, more importantly, the narrator’s repeated descent and ascent in and out of the strange gothic underworld that the signalman inhabits.<sup>86</sup> Whereas the signalman’s social and spatial marginality arguably give rise to his feelings of powerlessness, here they underpin the boy’s peculiar force.<sup>87</sup>

The Boy invites the reader to witness the spectacle of the junction: “[y]ou should see our Bandolining Room,” (bandoline was a product used to smooth the hair), “[y]ou should see ’em [the young ladies] at it, betwixt trains, Bandolining away,” “you should see their noses all a going up with scorn,” and “you should see ’em indignantly skipping across the Line” (17). However, the ladies

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<sup>86</sup> Graeme Tytler, “Dickens’s ‘The Signalman,’” *The Explicator* 53, no. 1 (1994): 27.

<sup>87</sup> On “The Signalman,” see Ewald Mengel, “The Structure and Meaning of Dickens’s ‘The Signalman,’” *Studies in Short Fiction* 20, no. 4 (1983): 271; Alessandro Vescovi, “The Bagman, the Signalman and Dickens’s Short Story,” in *Dickens: The Craft of Fiction and the Challenges of Reading*, ed. Clotilde de Stasio, Carlo Pagetti, and Alessandro Vescovi (Milan: Unicopoli, 2000), 119.

habitually snub those who are trying to catch their attention: Mrs Sniff, the Boy says, is “always looking another way from you, when you look at her” (18), and Mr Sniff was “spurned by all eyes” (19) when he has the audacity to correct the Missis’s grammar. However, the Boy claims that only a person of superior observational skills might spot him. As the room is made ready for the Missis to give her opinions on the French refreshment system,

Three chairs from the Waiting Room might have been perceived by a average eye, in front of her, on which the pupils was accommodated. Behind them, a very close observer might have discerned a Boy. Myself. (18)

His position indicates his low status, but he uses it to call into question the observational competency of the onlooker, and in doing so redraws his marginality as a mark of significance. Clearly Dickens had more than “a average eye.” The prominence of this visual schema is particularly conspicuous in a story which was originally published, like all of the other Christmas Numbers, without illustrations, and which relies entirely on the vivid immediacy of the narrator’s voice. However, for the 1871 Charles Dickens Edition, J. Mahoney provided an illustration of the Boy, which offers a visual counterpart to the narrative emphasis on looking.<sup>88</sup> In Mahoney’s illustration, (plate 1) the Boy is crouched behind the counter, eavesdropping on the Missis in confrontation with a customer (who, with his long beard, looks curiously like Dickens). The Missis and the customer lock their eyes on each other, but the Boy’s eyes are squeezed shut with laughter, so that although we can see him, he continues not to return the look. This network of gazes evokes what Andrews refers to as the “theatre of

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<sup>88</sup> See Glancy’s note on the illustrations in Dickens, *The Christmas Stories*, xliii.

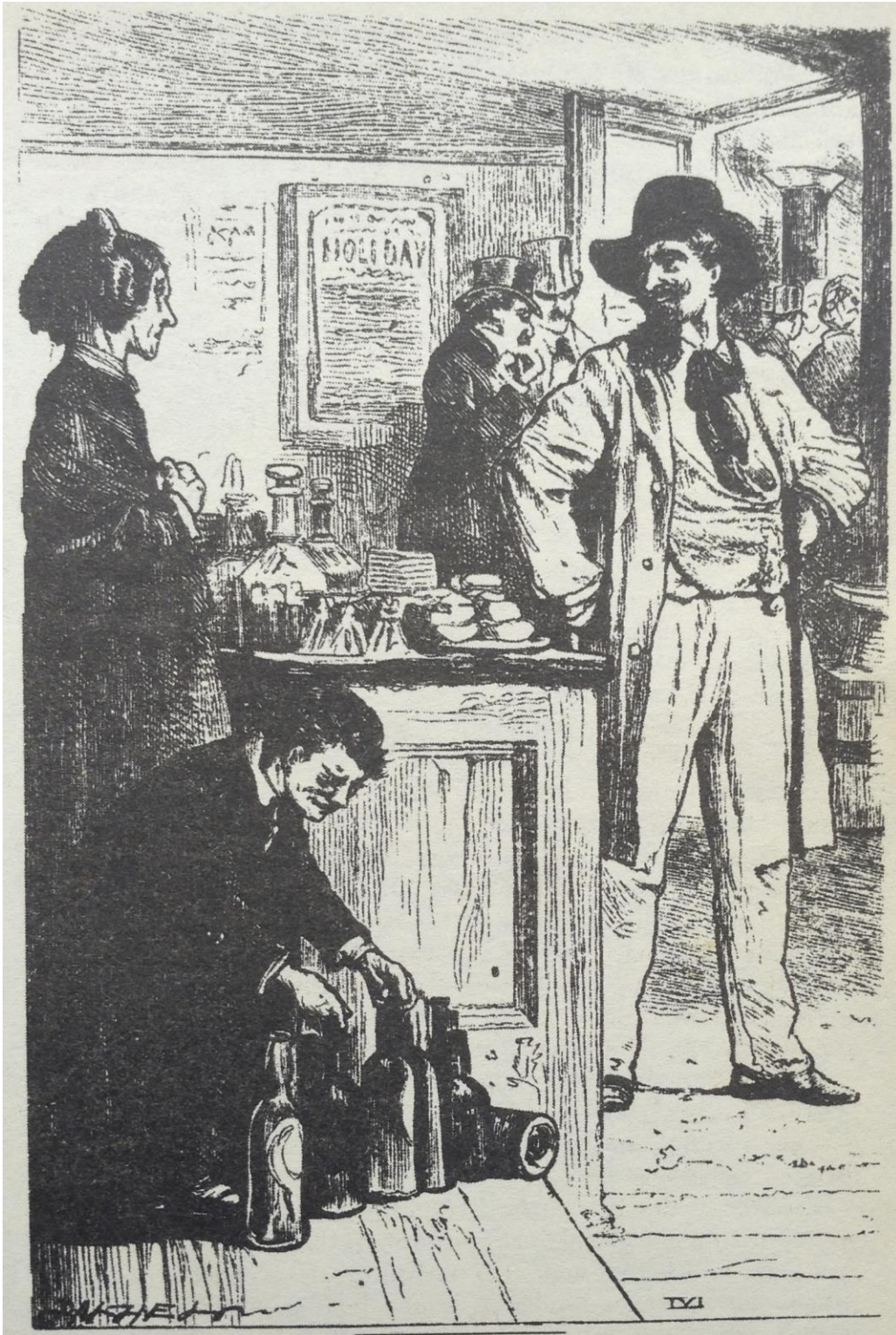


Plate 1. "The Boy at Mugby" by J. Mahoney, in Charles Dickens, *The Christmas Stories*, ed. Ruth Glancy (London: J. M. Dent, 1996), 647.

everyday life”: the performers (the ladies, the Boy) pretend not to see the audience, and are at the mercy of the director (the Missis) who glares at them from the wings.<sup>89</sup>

More than a child narrator, the Boy is a child performer; like the Victorian stage children who were “used to being watched, and to seeing themselves as objects of someone else’s contemplation,” he puts on different accents, does impressions, and recreates melodramatic scenes.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, the syllable “Mug” which Dickens has exchanged with “Rug” to create the fictional setting of the story is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as, amongst other things, a theatrical term meaning to pull a face, or overreact, especially in front of an audience.<sup>91</sup> Critics have explored the relationship between Dickens’s style and popular theatre, in particular the influence of the comic actor Charles Mathews, famed for his one-man shows in which he would impersonate a range of characters, and whom Dickens had seen perform many times.<sup>92</sup> Gubar has shown that child star actors, who were familiar, though not uncontroversial, sights throughout the period, were often called upon to bring to life an amazing array of characters in a single performance, “tragic and comic, male and female, old

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<sup>89</sup> Andrews, *Dickensian Laughter*, 38.

<sup>90</sup> Steedman, *Strange Dislocations*, 136.

<sup>91</sup> “mug,” entry 10, definition 3a, *Oxford English Dictionary*, web, March 2015.

<sup>92</sup> On Dickens and Charles Mathews, see for example Vlock, *Dickens, Novel Reading, and the Victorian Popular Theatre*, chap. 5; Andrews, *Charles Dickens and His Performing Selves*, 111–25; Andrews, *Dickensian Laughter*, 3–4; Paul Schlicke, *Dickens and Popular Entertainment* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1985), 234–38.

and young, English and foreign.”<sup>93</sup> Like the child performer, the Boy recalls the “foreigner” who had asked for “a leetel gloss hoff prarndee,” but was refused by the “disdaineous females” (17), and an American customer who had exclaimed, after similar treatment, that

such an Institution as Yew, and Yewer young ladies, and Yewer fixin’s solid and liquid, afore the glorious Tarnal I never did see yet! And if I hain’t found the eighth wonder of monarchical Creation, in finding Yew, and Yewer young ladies, and Yewer fixin’s solid and liquid, all as aforesaid, established in a country where the people air not absolute Loo-naticks, I am Extra Double Darned with a Nip and Frizzle to the innermostest grit! (18)

The Boy gives us not only the American’s particularised phrasing, but his accent, too, for example in “Yew” and “Loo-naticks.” For theatregoers, Steedman has shown, any hint that a child performer had been coerced or tortured into performing would entirely ruin the effect, which called for the child’s “manifestation of spontaneity and enjoyment.”<sup>94</sup> Within this theatrical context, the Boy’s declaration that his job is a “delightful lark” (17) and that he is glad he “took to it when young” (18), may be related to the contemporary debate surrounding child performers, which contested, amongst other things, the financial contribution that child performers made to household incomes, versus the potential for exploitation and cruelty.<sup>95</sup> The Missis, it appears, specialises in hardening her charges for the refreshment business:

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<sup>93</sup> Gubar, *Artful Dodgers*, 158, 161.

<sup>94</sup> Steedman, *Strange Dislocations*, 135.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 134–35.



What a lark it is! We are the Model Establishment, we are, at Mugby. Other Refreshment Rooms send their imperfect young ladies up to be finished off by our Missis. For some of the young ladies, when they're new to the business, come into it mild! Ah! Our Missis, she soon takes that out of 'em. Why, I originally come into the business meek myself. But our Missis she soon took that out of *me*. (17)

The phrase "What a lark" calls up Joe Gargery's idiosyncratic phrase, "what larks," and with him, perhaps, an earlier tyrannical matriarch, Mrs Joe Gargery. Just as Pip was at the mercy of this violent disciplinarian, the Missis at Mugby Junction receives "imperfect young ladies to be finished off" – a phrase which implies the promise of being killed, rather than perfected. Her performance of the conventionally feminine roles of nurturer and instructor coincides with her display of hostility and aggression; as such, she resembles a version of the grotesque maternal figures from Victorian stories for children (and adults) that U. C. Knoepfelmacher has described, such as the Duchess in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.<sup>96</sup>

This passage, and the story as a whole, could be seen to relate obliquely to Dickens's ambiguous position on child labour in general. Dickens was loath, Bodenheimer has argued, to commit himself to the cause of the working child. He let slip opportunities to enter into the public debate on industrial employment for women and children in the early 1840s, and even expressed his reluctance to take a stance against children in employment, lest it contribute to the reduction in the incomes of poor families.<sup>97</sup> Readers might have interpreted the Boy's precocity, comic though it is, as a result of the Missis's training. Claudia Nelson

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<sup>96</sup> U. C. Knoepfelmacher, *Ventures into Childland: Victorians, Fairy Tales, and Femininity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 17.

<sup>97</sup> Bodenheimer, *Knowing Dickens*, 62–63.

has argued that precocity in Dickens's child characters, like that of the Artful Dodger, is itself evidence of the influence of an unscrupulous adult, who manipulates children into appearing as willing participants, rather than as victims.<sup>98</sup> In the context of the theatre, Steedman has suggested that the very uncertainty among audiences about what was natural in a child performer, and what the result of "cruel parenting," was itself a source of enjoyable fascination as well as concern.<sup>99</sup> Here it certainly becomes a source of laughter. Whilst the obsession with reified fictional children has been seen as a way to allow Victorian adults wilfully to overlook the contemporary exploitation of real children, perhaps too there is something being effaced here, behind the laughter.<sup>100</sup>

The story's schema of looking and being looked at calls up the theatrical mode, but also, specifically, the types of dangerous gaze that belong to classical myth, as well as to the staging of that myth. Richard Schoch has shown that burlesques of classical mythology and other forms of high or popular culture, from Shakespeare to melodrama, were very popular on the Victorian stage. The Victorian burlesque, Schoch argues, rather than merely mocking the original text or target, often went much further, to challenge the very values and conventions of official culture itself.<sup>101</sup> The Boy's narrative does not draw on any particular

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<sup>98</sup> Claudia Nelson, *Precocious Children and Childish Adults: Age Inversion in Victorian Literature* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2012), 138.

<sup>99</sup> Steedman, *Strange Dislocations*, 132.

<sup>100</sup> Plotz, *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood*, 25.

<sup>101</sup> Richard W. Schoch, ed., *Victorian Theatrical Burlesques* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), xi-xxiii.

text, but the energy of burlesque drives the brio of his performance from the beginning and throughout, where he undermines the apparent divisions between high and low culture (which also accords with Bakhtin's description of carnival) by usurping the languages of myth and politics.<sup>102</sup> When eye contact isn't merely insolently withheld, it becomes dangerous. Sniff is a regular target of the dangerous gaze of his wife and the Missis. Before Mrs Sniff finally "descended on her victim," she had kept her eye on him like "the fabled obelisk," meaning basilisk, the mythical snake who could kill with a single glance (20). In his horribly ill-judged marriage, *Oliver Twist's* Mr Bumble attempts a basilisk look of his own, which is unnervingly ineffectual: "[h]ave the goodness to look at me," said Mr. Bumble, fixing his eyes upon her. 'If she stands such a eye as that,' said Mr. Bumble to himself, 'she can stand anything. It is a eye I never knew to fail with paupers, and if it fails with her my power is gone.'<sup>103</sup> His power, as it turns out, is gone indeed. Mrs Sniff has no such difficulty in dealing with her partner. If Mrs Sniff is like a basilisk, the Missis is a Medusa figure. In his regular position in the refreshment room, the Boy is exposed to the "glare of Our Missis's eye" (17). She casts Sniff a "killing look" (19), and the Boy recalls her fury at a customer helping themselves (as Dickens had at Rugby), describing "her hair almost a coming un-Bandolined with rage, and her eyes omitting sparks" (17).

In renouncing husbands and customers, the ladies' rebellion threatens patriarchal order itself. Indeed, the threat they pose to male power reaches its pinnacle as they stage their own version of one of the archetypal scenes of

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<sup>102</sup> Bakhtin, *Problem's of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 123.

<sup>103</sup> Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist, Or, The Parish Boy's Progress*, ed. Philip Horne (London: Penguin, 2003), 295–96.

traditional male hegemony – politics. Dickens had hinted at his mixed feelings towards women activists in “The Mortals in the House” in *A Haunted House*.<sup>104</sup>

Belinda Bates, one of the occupants of the haunted house, was involved in

Woman’s mission, Woman’s rights, Woman’s wrongs, and everything that is Woman’s with a capital W . . . . “Most praise-worthy, my dear, and Heaven prosper you!” I whispered to her on the first night . . . “but don’t overdo it. And in respect of the great necessity there is, my darling, for more employments being within the reach of Woman than our civilisation has as yet assigned to her, don’t fly at the unfortunate men, even those men who are at first sight in your way, as if they were the natural oppressors of your sex; for, trust me, Belinda, they do sometimes spend their wages among wives and daughters, sisters, mothers, aunts, and grandmothers; and the play is, really, not *all* Wolf and Red Riding-Hood, but has other parts in it.” (7)

The facetious tone may have been intended to tease Adelaide Anne Procter, an activist on women’s issues and a friend of Dickens’s, who took up the part of Belinda in the Number. In the Boy’s narrative the reference to the basilisk and the indirect references to Medusa underpin, in a comic way, the hostile femininity on show at the refreshment room – one that resists traditional ideas of feminine behaviour and sexuality. According to Christopher the waiter’s narrative in *Somebody’s Luggage*, the waitress must perform sexual availability for the customer – “for a Waitress known to be married would ruin the best of businesses” (1). The Boy’s description of Mrs Sniff demonstrates that theirs is a very different kind of performance: “[s]he’s the one with the small waist buckled in tight in front, and with the lace cuffs at her wrists, which she puts on the edge of the counter before her, and stands a smoothing while the public foams” (18). Whereas the waitress indulges a certain kind of appetite, for sexual stimulation

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<sup>104</sup> Gill Gregory, *The Life and Work of Adelaide Procter: Poetry, Feminism and Fathers* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 198.

as well as for food, the ladies intentionally frustrate the public with their small waists, lace collars, and (albeit unappetising) trays of eatables. The downtrodden husband's desire in particular is awakened by the Missis's description of the French refreshment system. The Boy notices that "Sniff was agin rubbing his stomach with a soothing hand, and that he had drored up one leg." This elevated leg gives his appetite an oddly erotic charge, and as the Missis's speech comes to an end, the Boy finds that Sniff "had drored up his leg with a higher and a higher relish, and was now discovered to be waving his corkscrew over his head" (20). Sniff's desire to use his corkscrew is an emblem of his obedience to the political and social status quo. However, his female counterparts have rendered his appendage useless, ridiculous, and undesirable.

The Boy's position "[u]p in a corner" of the refreshment room, "behind" the others, peering over their shoulders, reimagines the position of the novice court reporter. Drew emphasises that Dickens quickly made a name for himself amongst the gallery of parliamentary reporters; an elevated box which gave the young reporter a "vantage point," from which he was witness to the transactions of public business, but also to a range of rhetorical and oratorical styles, that were to stay with him.<sup>105</sup> In the Boy's language, the phonetic, verbal impressions, which recall those of a child performer, also reproduce the journalistic style that aimed to record speech verbatim, which Kreilkamp identifies as a characteristic feature of Dickens's work more generally.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Drew, *Dickens the Journalist*, 13, 37–38, 52.

<sup>106</sup> Kreilkamp, *Voice and the Victorian Storyteller*, 76; see also Andrews, *Charles Dickens and His Performing Selves*, 59–60.

The Boy's narrative also doubles as a burlesque of parliament and parliamentary rhetoric, with its smugness and moral outrage, and ends in a sexually charged rebellion by the ladies. The Boy refers early on to Papers (the newspaper seller) as "my honourable friend" (17), and denounces Sniff in a lofty tone, as "beneath contempt" (19) and his attitude, "disgusting servile" (18). The Boy's idiom is echoed in the Missis's gracious acknowledgment of the "righteous indignation of my friend Miss Piff" (20) during the meeting at which she gives "her views of foreign Refreshment, in the Bandolining Room" (18). The meeting resembles a political hustings, with signs around the room reading, "MAY ALBION NEVER LEARN," "KEEP THE PUBLIC DOWN," and "OUR REFRESHMENTING CHARTER" (18) (reminiscent of "how not to do it," the motto of the intentionally ineffectual bureaucracy of the circumlocution office in *Little Dorrit*).<sup>107</sup> The Missis's entrance sets the scene for something between an execution and a performance: "[o]n Our Missis's brow was wrote Severity, as she ascended the fatal platform. (Not that that was anythink new.)" (18) The meeting itself starts in traditional parliamentary fashion, in a chorus of "Hear! Hear! Hear!" (19). But the situation soon escalates to hysterical outrage and moral indignation as the Missis describes the elegance of the French refreshment system. Firstly, the Boy and the ladies "drored a heavy breath," then a "groan burst from the ladies" at the notion of "eatable things to eat," followed by "a murmer, swelling almost into a scream" at "drinkable things to drink." Upon describing the fresh offerings, the Missis's lips "quivered" until Mrs Sniff, though "scarcely less convulsed," felt obliged to hold a glass of water to them. A "cry of

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<sup>107</sup> Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, 119.

'Shame!' from all" was elicited by a description of the typical French "sangwich," followed by "[c]ontemptuous fury" at the elegant décor and attentive waiters. Eventually, the Missis succeeded in "working herself into a truly terrimenjious state" (19), a word which, apt, considering Sniff's situation, seems to blend "terror" and "men," or places "men" in the midst of "terror." The assembled crowd debates the appropriate label for someone who would wish to import the French system to Britain, and though the term selected is "malignant maniac" (20), the Boy's suggestion of "Bright" (20), referring to the then serving radical British politician John Bright, reinforces the political parallel, as well as creating a sense of contemporaneity, which often underpinned the effectiveness and humour of Victorian burlesque.<sup>108</sup> Finally, the Boy and the ladies are "raging mad all together" – the Boy doing his best to prolong and encourage the ladies' reactions – and the meeting climaxes in a "swelling tumult" (20). The scene merges politics and theatre, performance and madness, and the idiom belongs at once to melodrama and to the court reporter, descended from the gallery to describe in detail the often absurd reactions of the crowd – close enough to see the Missis's "dilated nostrils" (19) as she undertakes a description of the French ham sandwich.

In their passionate state, the ladies resemble the maenads of Greek mythology, the female followers of the god Dionysus, God of wine and theatre, amongst other things; wild women who would hold frenzied, orgiastic rituals in his name, away from prying eyes.<sup>109</sup> The imminence of the event had been

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<sup>108</sup> Schoch, *Victorian Theatrical Burlesques*, xxiii.

<sup>109</sup> Euripides, *Bakkhai*, trans. Reginald Gibbons (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3–32.

“penetrated to [the Boy] through the crevices of the Bandolining room” (18), which echoes the secrecy and sexuality of the Dionysian rituals. Indeed, as the Boy had earlier described the ladies’ ritual of bandolining as like “anointing themselves for the combat” (17), the bandolining room is already a site where sexuality and violence meet. They also resemble, perhaps, the “Menads” described by Thomas Carlyle in *The French Revolution*, who also formed a political assembly, albeit one which aimed to put an end to hunger, rather than to perpetuate it.<sup>110</sup> At the height of their frenzy, these dangerous women succeed in “castrating” their male victim, Sniff, who is frequently seen ineffectually carrying around his corkscrew (or waving it above his head):

It was at this moment that Mrs Sniff, who had kep’ her eye upon him . . . descended on her victim. Our Missis followed them both out, and cries was heard in the sawdust department. . . . he disappeared that night. Whether he perished, tore to pieces, I cannot say; but his corkscrew alone remains, to bear witness to the servility of his disposition. (20)

Like Pentheus, King of Thebes in Euripides’s play *Bakkhai*, Sniff is symbolically torn to pieces by the ladies when he intrudes on their ritual, a fate which the prying Boy manages to avoid. Like a young Dionysus, the Boy revels in this unrestrained display of female emotion, feeding their excitement with howls and yells of his own until they are ready to tear the hapless male apart – and keep his corkscrew as a phallic trophy of their victory. Young Dionysus, child performer, and reporter of parliamentary (and secret) spectacle, the Boy’s marginality, his position above, below, behind, to the side of, the action, gives him a unique range of vantage points from which to witness, and covertly participate in, the events.

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<sup>110</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution: A History*, ed. K. J. Fielding and David Sorensen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 282.



His language, both high rhetoric and unofficial dialect, embodies his ambivalent authority as a marginal figure with the power to ridicule and humiliate his customers. He demonstrates, as do many of Dickens's other first-person narrators from the Christmas Numbers, the vivid theatricality of life at the margins.

### Chapter 3 – Lodging in Language: The *Lirriper* Stories (1863-64)

Throughout his writing, Dickens was drawn to places of temporary residence – the inn, the hotel, the lodging-house – their guardians, and the transient people who passed through them. The consecutive numbers *The Seven Poor Travellers* and *The Holly Tree Inn* (1854, 1855) are both set in inns, and a significant portion of the 1860 Number *A Message From The Sea* takes place in one too; the 1856 Number, *The Wreck of the Golden Mary* is set on a passenger ship; *A House To Let* (1858) is set in and is concerned with rented accommodation, as is *The Haunted House* (1859); the setting of *Somebody's Luggage* (1862) is a coffee-room and lodgings business. The only principal character that Dickens brought back during eighteen years of producing the Christmas Number was Emma Lirriper, a widowed landlady of a small, furnished lodging-house, who narrates *Mrs Lirriper's Lodgings* (1863) and *Mrs Lirriper's Legacy* (1864). She is the last of Dickens's four female narrators: Esther in *Bleak House*, Miss Wade in *Little Dorrit*, and Sophonisba in *A House To Let*. This was the second, and final, time that Dickens brought back characters at all (if we exclude his serial narrator from *The Uncommercial Traveller*). In 1840, Mr Pickwick, Sam Weller, and Weller Senior had reappeared in an unsuccessful venture, the periodical *Master Humphrey's Clock*.<sup>1</sup> There is little doubt that Dickens had the public response in mind when he brought Emma Lirriper back. In December 1863 he wrote “[m]y esteemed friend Mrs Lirriper has made a most extraordinary mark on the public.

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<sup>1</sup> Chesterton describes Emma as the “female equivalent of Mr Pickwick” in *Criticisms and Appreciations*, 82.

I doubt if I have ever done any thing that has been so affectionately received by such an enormous audience. I can't turn any where without encountering some enthusiasm about her."<sup>2</sup> But readers may also glean from the vivid richness of the writing, the tempo, the sense of the city, the itinerant lifestyles that Dickens had known in his young life, the beauty of France that he came to know as an adult, that he was channelling particularly personal energies into the *Lirriper* stories; indeed, he wrote of the *Legacy* that "[i]t is the condensation of a quantity of subject and the very greatest pains."<sup>3</sup>

In the first story we learn how Emma Lirriper came to establish a lodging-house, and how she and her long-term lodger Jemmy Jackman ("the Major") adopted an illegitimate baby boy, born to Peggy, an unwed young lodger who was abandoned there by her lover Mr Edson. In the second story, after receiving a mysterious legacy from a man who lies dying in France, Emma travels to the French town of Sens with the Major and her adopted grandson, also named Jemmy, where they discover that the dying man is Jemmy's father – a complete stranger to his son. The stories speak, in their setting and subject matter, to the notion of hospitality, which Jacques Derrida describes as a question of home and the family, the host and the stranger, border crossing and nationality.<sup>4</sup> Bowen has argued that the idea of hospitality is "everywhere" in Dickens's fiction;<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Pilgrim, 10:324.

<sup>3</sup> Pilgrim, 10:441.

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000), 48, 55.

<sup>5</sup> John Bowen, "Dickens's Hospitality," in *Charles Dickens: The Inimitable*, ed. Christine Huguet (Paris: Democratic Books, 2011), 48.

indeed, it is the foundation of these stories about a woman who invites strangers to cross her threshold for a living. Hospitality, in a general sense, could be said to acquire a particular intensity in conjunction with Christmas, as a time combining the nativity story, where there wasn't any room at the inn, and general sociability and conviviality. As the stories show, among other things, the lodging-house tends to attract individuals who are side-lined by mainstream bourgeois values: the widow, the mature bachelor, the petty criminal, the impoverished and neglected young woman, the illegitimate orphan. For Chesterton, Emma Lirriper perfectly demonstrates the "virtue of Christian charity."<sup>6</sup> However, the *Lirriper* stories go far beyond the traditional seasonal concern with Christian or ethical protocols of openness: the *Lirriper* stories are also among the most linguistically rich prose that Dickens ever produced. It feels as if he left nothing out, just as Emma would never leave a stranger out in the cold.

This chapter won't focus on hospitality, but it is worth considering for a moment, because of the way that Dickens was drawn, as critics have noted in the past, to the ways in which the office of the landlord could be seen as analogous to his own position as a writer. In an 1834 letter to Henry Kolve, Dickens refers to himself as the "proprietor" of one of his sketches, "The Boarding House," and he was later to adopt "Tibbs," the name of the landlord of that sketch, as a pseudonym at the magazine *Bell's Life in London*.<sup>7</sup> Douglas-Fairhurst has suggested that by adopting the voice of a landlady in the *Lirriper* stories, Dickens demonstrated that he was still, all these years later, interested in the comparison of running a boarding house and the careful handling of characters in the act of

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<sup>6</sup> Chesterton, *Criticisms and Appreciations*, 81.

<sup>7</sup> Patten, *Charles Dickens and "Boz,"* 45–46; Drew, *Dickens the Journalist*, 32.

writing a novel.<sup>8</sup> But it may have been the role of editor that was foremost in Dickens's mind, for it is the editor, like the host, who has the task of "choosing, electing, filtering, selecting their invitees, visitors, or guests."<sup>9</sup> The novel, Bowen suggests, might be "the most hospitable of literary forms," given the endless variety of situations, characters, styles, and genres it can encompass.<sup>10</sup> The Christmas Number, by this token, was a very hospitable kind of production, and Dickens a hospitable editor (despite throwing Somebody's corrections in the fire), with stories about everything from enchanted armchairs to ghost's umbrellas; from stories of colonial adventure and shipwreck to schoolboy runaways; from suicide parties to social climbers.<sup>11</sup> A single Number might take you through subjects as diverse as vengeful ghosts, racist in-laws, hack authors, and hermits, by writers as little known as Eliza Griffiths (who has no entry in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography), or as well known as Elizabeth Gaskell. The contributed stories give a sense, each time, of overlapping, simultaneous histories, rather than a single, linear narrative. Indeed, this broad spectrum of subjects, characters, and authors emulates the multiplicity of the itinerant community that may be found moving between places of temporary residence;<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Douglas-Fairhurst, *Becoming Dickens*, 133.

<sup>9</sup> Derrida and Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality*, 55.

<sup>10</sup> Bowen, "Dickens's Hospitality," 47.

<sup>11</sup> On the Christmas Number and the colonial narrative, see Jude Piesse, "Dreaming across Oceans: Emigration and Nation in the Mid-Victorian Christmas Issue," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 46, no. 1 (2013): 37–60.

<sup>12</sup> Waters, *Commodity Culture*, 7; Sharon Marcus, *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 2.

the “human flotsam and jetsam” in writer Marie Belloc Lowndes’s description, “which drifts about every great city.”<sup>13</sup>

Bodenheimer has argued that the period during the late 1840s, when Dickens was taking charge of his own family home, coincided with a shift in his literary interest away from the inns and lodgings of his early work, towards houses. Within this trajectory, the framed-tale format of the Christmas Number, she argues, constituted a kind of “narrative house,” with each room furnished by a different author.<sup>14</sup> However, like the tavern, inn, or lodgings, rather than the more permanent notion of the family home, *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* were only temporary homes for many of the stories, which were republished separately, in single-author collections, for example Ticknor and Field’s Diamond Edition of Dickens’s works which included *The Uncommercial Traveller and Additional Christmas Stories*, or Adelaide Anne Procter’s collection of poems, *Legends and Lyrics*, for which Dickens wrote an introduction after her death. Just as the lodger moves on, so did these texts, usually acquiring new neighbours and a new name.<sup>15</sup>

The lodging-house generally presents the risk of being shut at close quarters with people whom you would never willingly choose as companions, and the ominous stranger encountered in a sinister inn or lodgings became a familiar trope. When it came to the unauthorised republication of his work in

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<sup>13</sup> Marie Belloc Lowndes, *The Lodger* (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1932), 20.

<sup>14</sup> Bodenheimer, *Knowing Dickens*, 128.

<sup>15</sup> For example, see the entries for Collins’s “The Dream Woman,” originally “The Ostler,” and “Blow Up With the Brig!” originally “The Ghost in the Cupboard Room,” in *Wilkie Collins: The Complete Shorter Fiction*, ed. Julian Thompson (New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, Inc., 1995), 143, 383. For Dickens, see Glancy in *The Christmas Stories*, xxxvii–xl.

America, Dickens recast his feelings of powerlessness and of physical violation in terms that evoke being thrown in, unwillingly, with rough company:

Is it not a horrible thing that scoundrel-booksellers should grow rich here from publishing books, the authors of which do not reap one farthing from their issue, by scores of thousands? And that every vile, blackguard, and detestable newspaper, – so filthy and so bestial that no honest man would admit one into his house, for a water-closet door-mat – should be able to publish those same writings, side by side, cheek by jowl, with the coarsest and most obscene companions, with which they *must* become connected in course of time, in people’s minds? Is it tolerable that besides being robbed and rifled, an author should be *forced* to appear in any form – in any vulgar dress – in any atrocious company – that he should have no choice of his audience – no controul [*sic*] over his own distorted text . . . ?<sup>16</sup>

Unauthorised periodical publication has all the impact of the uncomfortable closeness and physical proximity of impoverished living (“side by side, cheek by jowl”). In Dickens’s terms, it becomes a question of thresholds and boundaries: of who you admit into your own house; of whose house you’d be willing to enter; of the company you keep; of the very clothes on your back. One of the reasons Dickens gave for abandoning the Christmas Number was that he “became weary of having [his] own writing swamped by that of other people.”<sup>17</sup> A sense of crossed boundaries, personal invasion, overcrowding, and potential damage to his own writing are implied in this phrase, and in the letter. Emma Lirriper knows all about being robbed and rifled and being with bad company, and also perhaps about what it means to have your reputation tarnished by association. Indeed, Dickens uses the *Lirriper* stories to play with and against ideas about the

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<sup>16</sup> Pilgrim, 3:230. This letter is also quoted in Meredith McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 114; and Drew, *Dickens the Journalist*, 63.

<sup>17</sup> Pilgrim, 12:212.

landlady and the lodging house that were in common circulation as literary and theatrical stereotypes, and as part of broad public discourses which were concerned with national identity, crime, and morality.

In the *Lirriper* stories, Dickens is able to explore his interest in the figure of the landlady and the lodging-house, which he uses not only to call up and challenge both literary and theatrical traditions and contemporary stereotypes, but also to reimagine the collaborative and urban character of the Christmas Number itself.

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Number Eighty-one Norfolk Street Strand – situated midway between the City and St. James’s and within five minutes’ walk of the principal places of public amusement – is my address. (1, *Lodgings*)

The statement of her address falls like an anchor against the transient flow of people through this busy London thoroughfare. Of all of Dickens’s Christmas Number contributions, the *Lirriper* stories give the strongest impression of the city of London; of places that Dickens knew intimately as a child and adult. Norfolk Street, as Emma describes it, is

a delightful street to lodge in – provided you don’t go lower down – but of a summer evening when the dust and waste paper lie in it and stray children play in it and a kind of a gritty calm and bake settles on it and a peal of church-bells is practising in the neighbourhood it is a trifle dull . . . . (6-7, *Lodgings*)



Dickens not only knew the geography and landmarks of the area exceptionally well, but also the sensation of walking these streets, the “bake” of the sun in summer, hardening the dirt in the road to dust and grit, and the peal of the bells from nearby St. Clement Danes and perhaps St. Dunstan-in-the-West, a few minutes east on Fleet Street. The remarkable course of Dickens’s life could be partly told in connection with the Strand, and his memories of it must have been extremely mixed: the wonder of being treated to a walk into the City as a child, perhaps right past the grand Somerset House, where John Dickens had worked and would work again after leaving the Marshalsea; the bitter despair at being sent at so early an age to work at Warren’s Blacking factory by the river, when he would sometimes wander alone amongst the Adelphi arches, watching the coal-heavers; the ambition and expectations of a young author coming up in the world, writing for publications like *Bell’s Life in London* and the *Morning Chronicle*, who had offices on the Strand, as did his first principal publishers, Chapman and Hall; and, at the time of writing the *Lirriper* stories, the celebrated author with his own editorial office and apartment on Wellington Street, only a few minutes walk from Norfolk Street.<sup>18</sup> In *David Copperfield*, Dickens evokes the way that both bright and dark associations, the chiaroscuro of memory and experience, can gather around one particular place. Like Dickens, David explored the Adelphi, “a mysterious place, with those dark arches,” and years later would look in that direction and think of “the old days when [he] used to roam about its subterranean arches, and on the happy changes which had brought [him] to the

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<sup>18</sup> See Forster, *Life*, 1873, 1:14, 19, 42–43. The front pages of the *Morning Chronicle* and *Bell’s Life in London and Sporting Chronicle* list their offices as on the Strand. See also Slater, *Charles Dickens*, 23.

surface.”<sup>19</sup> Jeremy Tambling has pointed out the recurrence of the Adelphi as a particularly dramatically charged location in Dickens’s writing. It is here that Emma pursues Peggy, the abandoned young mother, who turned her head “the river way” at every intersection, before Emma catches up with her in front of the “dark dismal arches” (7, *Lodgings*); a passage which recalls a similar episode in which David Copperfield and Peggotty follow Martha Endell as she walks on a similar mission “looking intently” at the river.<sup>20</sup>

But Dickens may also have been thinking about another Norfolk Street, one in touching distance of the notorious district of St. Giles and the wealthy part of Marylebone parish, and in walking distance from the affluent areas of Bloomsbury and Mayfair. As Ruth Richardson has shown, his family lived on Norfolk Street, Marylebone, twice, in the same flat above a shop that looked in one direction towards Middlesex Hospital, and in the other towards the Cleveland Street Workhouse.<sup>21</sup> He may not have remembered their first stay at the house, as he was only three, but he would almost certainly have remembered the second, encompassing his late teenage years. It was a time of mixed fortunes for the Dickens family; their life in the mid- to late-1820s was unsettled, and they moved house with remarkable frequency, pursued by John Dickens’s money

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<sup>19</sup> Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 171, 364.

<sup>20</sup> Jeremy Tambling, *Going Astray: Dickens and London* (Harlow, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2009), 128; see also F. S. Schwartzbach, *Dickens and the City* (London: Athlone Press, 1979), 25.

<sup>21</sup> Ruth Richardson, *Dickens and the Workhouse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 178.

troubles.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, their landlord on Norfolk Street, John Dodd, was one of John Dickens's creditors.<sup>23</sup> But it was from this address on Norfolk Street, as Richardson points out, that his life was changed forever, for it was while living here that he began life as a parliamentary reporter.<sup>24</sup> The *Lirriper* stories, with their debt and debt collectors, their humour and despair, the absurdity and pathos in their scenes of conflict and humiliation, their staging of the dazzling performativity of life amongst the upwardly striving classes, give the impression of learning life's lessons the hard way, and capture in essence the divergent highs and lows that may have gathered in Dickens's memory around this street name.

That each Number ends with Jemmy regaling his adoring adult listeners with stories, which he bases on his own life, draws attention to (as Christopher's narrative had) the act of transforming one's own life into stories, and the way in which autobiographical details might be given a playful twist or dressed up. In this context, the description given by Emma's maid, Sophy, for the ever-present smudges of black on her upturned nose reads wonderfully like an analogy for the way that the experiences of childhood might spontaneously present themselves in the present. "Oh Sophy Sophy for goodness goodness sake where does it [the dirt] come from?" Emma asks, and Sophy explains, "I took a deal of black into me ma'am when I was a small child being much neglected and I think it must be, that it works out" (3, *Lodgings*). This moment, in which Dickens describes the way

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<sup>22</sup> Michael Allen, *Charles Dickens' Childhood* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1988), 110–12; see also Slater, *Charles Dickens*, 31; Claire Tomalin, *Charles Dickens: A Life* (London: Penguin, 2012), 27; Richardson, *Dickens and the Workhouse*, 21.

<sup>23</sup> Allen, *Charles Dickens' Childhood*, 30.

<sup>24</sup> Richardson, *Dickens and the Workhouse*, 183.

soot works its way out from the depths of her past to the surface of her skin, can be collected together with copious references to blacking in his work, a seemingly endless creative fund. Perhaps he is attempting to “work out” something about his own childhood, or perhaps it naturally “works out” in the course of writing fiction. As Christopher’s story was working out, rather than resolving, ideas about wives, collaborators, and Christmas Numbers, Emma’s stories are working out an ambivalent relationship to the city, to home, to parents, and to the past.

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Throughout Dickens’s life, and both earlier and later, the lodging-house, the landlady, and the hospitable relationship, were the focus of serious criticism, scandal, and ridicule. The model of the single-family home, exalted in John Ruskin’s description as a “shelter” from the roughness of the outside world, was not the reality for all, as the Dickens family could well testify.<sup>25</sup> In Dickens’s early Christmas Number story, “The Poor Relation’s Story” (*RS*), a bachelor who lives in lodgings reimagines his life as a married man, living in a castle: not “an old baronial habitation,” but a “building always known to every one by the name of a Castle” (2). That he is finally forced to admit that it is a mere “Castle . . . in the air” (5), reveals the gap between the ideal notion of the Englishman’s home as his castle, and reality. Indeed, whereas Christopher’s narrative dwelt in part on the

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<sup>25</sup> John Ruskin, ““Of Queens’ Gardens’ from *Sesame and Lilies*,” in *John Ruskin: Selected Writings*, ed. Dinah Birch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 158.

difficulty of maintaining a clear distinction between professional performance and true identity, between domestic and public life, in Emma's case the very setting undermines the possibility of any separation of home and work. Despite the realities of urban living for many, Sharon Marcus states that the ideal of the single-family home was an integral part of British collective identity, and that "[a]lmost every book about London published between the 1840s and the 1870s singled out lodging-houses and lodgings as exemplars of urban dirt, disease, crowding, and promiscuity."<sup>26</sup> The year 1851 saw the publication of a census report which reiterated the desirability of single-family dwellings, and the introduction of legislation in the form of the Common Lodging Houses Act, which granted local authorities with certain regulatory powers over lodging-houses, to try and deal with problems including overcrowding, the spread of disease, crime, and to ensure the proper separation of the sexes.<sup>27</sup> In 1850, multiple papers across the country reported the case of Emma Bennett, a fifteen-year-old girl who was raped in a London lodging-house by a man in his sixties. In the lodging-house they were both staying at, married couples and single men and women of all ages shared the few rooms on offer. The judge, Mr Arnold, was highly critical of the landlord and the lack of separation among tenants, which he believed

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<sup>26</sup> Marcus, *Apartment Stories*, 104. Bodenheimer suggests that in Dickens, even "To Let signs invariably suggest sad stories of decline"; see *Knowing Dickens*, 166–68.

<sup>27</sup> See Leonore Davidoff, "The Separation of Home and Work? Landladies and Lodgers in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century England," in *Fit Work for Women*, ed. Sandra Burman (London: Croom Helm, 1979), 71–72; Marcus, *Apartment Stories*, 86.

would inevitably lead to “gross immorality.”<sup>28</sup> In May 1864, between the publication of the two *Lirriper* stories, a “painful tragedy in London” was reported. A young married couple had let one of their rooms out of financial necessity; shortly afterwards, the husband found evidence that his wife was having an affair with their lodger, an older married man. Unable to bear it, and believing she had been coerced into the relationship, he planned for them to commit suicide together. He shot himself in front of her; she did not follow suit.<sup>29</sup> There are countless newspaper articles of criminals being apprehended in “low” lodging-houses, and of fights, prostitution, robbery, and fraud associated with their inmates.

The lodging-house, then, is a politically and ideologically charged site, and some of the early Christmas Number stories, written around the time of the Lodging Houses Act, engaged with related issues. Samuel Sidney’s “The Colonel’s Story” (*ARS*) describes the house of a former nobleman in London, which has been split into lodgings – a “perfect caravanserai, in the number and variety of its inmates” (29). It is a place in which people from different social circles are brought under the same roof: “[t]he best rooms were let to Members of Parliament and persons like myself; but, in the upper floor, many persons of humbler means but genteel pretensions had rooms” (29). The very space itself is a manifestation of the social aspiration that the narrator describes, with the wealthy and the humble guests only nominally separate, for they share a

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<sup>28</sup> “Extraordinary Charge of Violation,” *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper*, December 1, 1850.

<sup>29</sup> “Painful Tragedy in London,” *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, May 11, 1864.

staircase, which is where the narrator becomes acquainted with one of the “humbler” female guests: “the neat ankles, a small white hand, a dark curl peeping out of the veil, made me anxious to know more” (29). Even her physical description – a sequence of feet, hands, hair – enacts the action of watching her descend past him on the stairs from the “upper floor”; and the word “peeping” carries an erotic charge as an illicit, secretive kind of watching, that might occur in these communal areas. Knowing that his uncle will disinherit him for marrying a woman without a fortune, the narrator keeps his marriage a secret. However, his new wife, who is of mixed English and French heritage, is revealed to be a shallow and aggressive “tigress” (30), and she is eventually brutally murdered, for which the narrator almost gets the blame. The physical layout of the lodging house, which fails to rigorously enforce the kind of social distinctions that the narrator’s uncle fervently upholds – the kind that are most closely aligned to the noble classes to whom the building belonged before it was divided for lodgings – is a spatial precursor for the woman’s transgression, which leads to the destruction of domestic life. The building itself encapsulates the social heterogeneity of the city. Marcus argues that this was part of the appeal of the apartment building for Parisians; here, it enables a marriage that the story implies should never have taken place.<sup>30</sup>

There was a deep and enduring fascination with the potential for violence and mishap in the lodging-house that continued throughout the century and into the next. Henry James wrote of the nineteenth-century sensation novelists, like Wilkie Collins and Mary Elizabeth Braddon, that “[i]nstead of the terrors of

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<sup>30</sup> Marcus, *Apartment Stories*, 17.

*Udolpho*, we were treated to the terrors of the cheerful country-house and the busy London lodgings. And there is no doubt that these were infinitely the more terrible.”<sup>31</sup> Wilkie Collins’s “The Policeman and the Cook” (1881) describes how a lodging house cook had taken revenge on a former lover by creeping into his bedroom, murdering him as he slept, and afterwards attempting to frame his wife.<sup>32</sup> In Algernon Blackwood’s “Smith: An Episode in a Lodging-House” (1906), the narrator is strangely drawn to a mysterious lodger who, it transpires, dabbles dangerously in the occult. In her novel *The Lodger*, originally published in 1913 and based on the Jack the Ripper murders of 1888, Marie Belloc Lowndes evoked the potential risk of taking in lodgers in a story in which an old couple who fall on hard times take in a man whom the landlady soon suspects of being behind a series of brutal murders. Bella and Lavinia Wilfer in Dickens’s *Our Mutual Friend*, thoroughly put out at the family’s humiliating financial situation, scornfully remark that their new lodger, John Rokesmith (really John Harmon) will probably cut their throats in the night.<sup>33</sup> The lodging-house encounter enables authors to explore an individual’s or group’s relation towards outsiders and the potential risks of hospitality, but also to reimagine the old familiar romantic networks which saw boys and girls married off to their favourite cousins, or some other sensible match within a fairly closed circuit of

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<sup>31</sup> Henry James, “Miss Braddon,” in *Wilkie Collins: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Norman Page (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), 123.

<sup>32</sup> Wilkie Collins, “The Policeman and the Cook,” in *Wilkie Collins: The Complete Shorter Fiction*, ed. Julian Thompson (New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, Inc., 1995), 721–36. Thompson points out that this story was originally published as “Who Killed Zebedee?” in *The Seaside Library*, 721.

<sup>33</sup> Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, 51; Waters describes the loss of status felt by the Wilfers at taking in a lodger, in *Dickens and the Politics of Family*, 182–85.



acquaintances, and refocus their sexual and psychological interest instead on the stranger. Strangers are generally bad news in several of the early Christmas Number stories. In Eliza Lynn's gothic "The Old Lady's Story" (*ARS*), the arrival of the stranger is linked with the threat to female virtue, as the narrator recalls how she became infatuated with an exotic newcomer, Mr Felix, and was almost persuaded to elope. In Gaskell's "The Squire's Story" (*ARS*) a stranger marries into a notable family only to be exposed years later as a highwayman and hung for murder. And in another of Samuel Sidney's contributions, "The Guest's Story" (*RS*), a wandering Irishman charms a small, dull English seaside town, before deceiving several local men into a fictitious treasure-hunting scheme in which he relieves them of a quantity of their money.

Though the reality of life in lodgings was undoubtedly varied, the public discourse surrounding the lodging-house was overwhelmingly negative. It was into this discourse that Emma Lirriper emphatically intervened. Indeed, Dickens seems generally more inclined than most of his contributors to explore the comic or absurd potential of the lodging-house scenario, and of the place it has in the storytelling tradition. The narrator of "The Guest" (*HTI*), for example, recounts how he was subjected to stories about murderous and cannibalistic landlords (and the crowing cockerels and talking parrots who exposed their crimes), by his nurse, "a sallow woman with a fishy eye" (4).<sup>34</sup> Even the real-life case described by this narrator, which demonstrates the continuity between real and fictional portrayals of the lodging-house, is tinged with absurdity. Jonathan Bradford, an Oxford innkeeper, planned to murder his lodger, but was beaten to it.

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<sup>34</sup> This is reminiscent of the sadistic nurse that Dickens recalls in one of his sketches for the *Uncommercial Traveller* series; see "Nurse's Stories," 169-80.

Unfortunately for him, he was discovered in a state of disbelief standing over the dead body, and hung for the crime (5). Dickens's early sketch, "The Boarding House," plays with, without seriously denigrating, the unsavoury reputation which attached to the lodging-house. The sketch is a catalogue of sexual innuendoes and mishaps: secret marriages, absconding husbands and wives, midnight rendezvous, a breach of promise trial, and at the centre of it a landlady, Mrs Tibbs, who despises her husband, and a husband who hates her back and wants to tickle the servants. Patten sees this sketch as a transformation of Dickens's own "adolescent experiences of barely respectable lodgings and characters," an identification which perhaps partly explains why Dickens later adopted Tibbs as a pseudonym.<sup>35</sup>

The worst part of renting a furnished house, according to Thomas Hardy, was that the "articles in the rooms are saturated with the thoughts and glances of others."<sup>36</sup> This idea speaks strongly to the inns of Dickens's first novel. As Emma thoughtfully wonders, "[t]he walls of my Lodgings . . . might have something to tell, if they could tell it" (12, *Lodgings*), "The Queer Client's Story" from *The Pickwick Papers* implies that the walls themselves might be the silent witnesses of, and indeed a repository for, more sinister kinds of stories: "[t]here is not a pannel [*sic*] in the old wainscoting, but what, if it were endowed with the powers of speech and memory, could start from the wall, and tell its tale of horror."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Patten, *Charles Dickens and "Boz,"* 45; Douglas-Fairhurst offers a different interpretation for his use of this pseudonym in *Becoming Dickens*, 133.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Hardy quoted in Florence Emily Hardy, *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, 1892-1928* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1930), 17.

<sup>37</sup> Charles Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers*, ed. James Kinsley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 251.

“The Bagman’s Story” from *Pickwick* imagines the kinds of trace or memory left in articles of furniture that have been shared over many years. Tom Smart, who is drunk, imagines that the chair in his room comes to life; a lewd, creaky old chair, who talks about the landlady in an “unpleasantly amorous” way, and boasts that “hundreds of fine women have sat in my lap for hours together.”<sup>38</sup> The chair represents the sordid intimacy of the old inn, which is not limited to the shared furniture; downstairs a married man was trying very hard to seduce the landlady, and on his way to his room Tom had kissed the maid.

The *Lirriper* stories explicitly acknowledge the reputation of the lower end of lodging-house life, including stories of illegitimate births, thefts, and violence, which are not only the subject matter, but have been absorbed into the very grammar. The opening of the first *Lirriper* story deals with the theft of belongings by the strangers who come in and out, attracted by the bill in the window:

Whoever would begin to be worried with letting Lodgings that wasn’t a lone woman with a living to get is a thing inconceivable to me my dear, excuse the familiarity but it comes natural to me in my own little room when wishing to open my mind to those that I can trust and I should be truly thankful if they were all mankind but such is not so, for have but a Furnished bill in the window and your watch on the mantelpiece and farewell to it if you turn your back for but a second however gentlemanly the manners, nor is being of your own sex any safeguard as I have reason in the form of sugar-tongs to know, for that lady (and a fine woman she was) got me to run for a glass of water on the plea of going to be confined, which certainly turned out true but it was in the Station-House. (1, *Lodgings*)

As real objects disappear from Emma’s front room, grammatical objects disappear from her language, and things seem to take on a life of their own as

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 168.

ownership becomes increasingly at risk; a new context for the frequently noted equivocality between people and things in Dickens's fiction. The male thief disappears so quickly that he leaves only the depersonalised "the manners" behind, but the trace of his presence rings through the words that make up the anecdote – "mankind," "mantelpiece," "gentlemanly," "manners." In keeping with the independent life of things (and, undoubtedly, the inflated significance of such genteel articles among the house proud lower classes) the "sugar-tongs" precede the lady in Emma's recollection, and even become the physical form of intangible human reason. The first full stop is preceded by the image of the "Station-House," as grammar and image together put an end to the character's slippery playacting. In contrast, the pun on "confined" (meaning both in prison and in labour) indicates a witty verbal freedom, a different kind of doubleness to the girl's performance. Indeed, on a couple of other occasions, playacting is linked with duplicity and with the threat of violence. Emma's brother-in-law, Joshua, is arrested at her lodgings in disguise, "with an umbrella up and the Major's hat on," claiming to be "Sir Johnson Jones K. C. B. in spectacles residing at the Horse Guards" (2, *Legacy*); the next she heard of him he was "coming out at a Private Theatre in the character of a Bandit" (3, *Legacy*). The affected civility of the Major's public encounters with his enemy, Mr Buffle, the tax collector, remind Emma of "Hamlet and the other gentleman in mourning before killing one another" (4, *Legacy*). The pun on "confined" also establishes a connection between the self and space that other instances in the narrative will play out.

In another brief anecdote, the object of the sentence disappears from the language just as they had dashed quickly out of Emma's door:

Now it did so happen my dear that I had been forced to put five shillings weekly additional on the second in consequence of a loss from running away full-dressed as if going out to a dinner-party, which was very artful and had made me rather suspicious . . . . (5, *Lodgings*)

That the first word to refer directly to the individual is the present participle “running,” captures the fact that the lodger was already running off by the time Emma had any idea about it. The lodger defies capture in words, and in the other sense presumably. Or perhaps the individual is just less prominent in Emma’s memory than the vexing issue of the lost rent. On the similarly irksome subject of dirty maids, Emma states that “naturally lodgers do not like good society to be shown in with a smear of black across the nose or a smudgy eyebrow” (2, *Lodgings*). Like the male thief and his “manners,” the girls have disappeared from the sentence, represented only by the generalised “the nose” or “a smudgy eyebrow.” Focalised through Emma’s fastidious gaze, the offending smudges swim to the very centre of the scene. As the girls disappear, the smudgy marks seem to transfer by default onto the “good society,” (shown in literally “with a smear of black across the nose”), accomplishing linguistically what Emma fears: that her more elegant guests will be made dirty by her slovenly employees. In another imaginative shift, Emma describes that valued ornaments must be hidden to prevent them being stolen. She gives the example of a “silver cream-jug which is between ourselves and the bed and the mattress in my room up-stairs (or it would have found legs so sure as ever the Furnished bill was up)” (2, *Lodgings*).<sup>39</sup> It is a bizarre sentence, which gives the impetus to the jug, rather

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<sup>39</sup> Bowen refers to the “surreal creativity” of Mrs Nickleby, to whom Emma is often compared, in *Other Dickens*, 127.

than the thief; personalises the bed furniture by letting it in on the secret; but also, for a moment, by virtue of her chronic lack of punctuation, seems to situate Emma and the addressee in the bedroom together, with the cream-jug literally “between” them. These shifts are all part of a world where ownership is under threat and the boundaries between bodies, other bodies, and things are unclear. Within this context, where the boundary between the self and the external world is constantly changing, things are always at risk of becoming absurd. The relatively solemn tone with which Emma describes Peggy’s despair and fainting fit, after she realises she has been abandoned, soon gives way to a farcical encounter between the Major and a street-organ:

Everything I needed to bring her round the Major brought up with his own hands, besides running out to the chemist’s for what was not in the house and likewise having the fiercest of all his many skirmishes with a musical instrument representing a ball-room I do not know in what particular country and company waltzing in and out at folding-doors with rolling eyes. (6, *Lodgings*)

It is an absurd scene: the Major has an argument with a street-organ, rather than its operator, while its little mechanised scene of dancers continues to pop in and out of the machinery, indifferent to his fury, making his anger ridiculous by (not) witnessing it with their unseeing, “rolling eyes.”<sup>40</sup>

The *Lirriper* stories address the phenomenon of violence and terror associated with the lodging-house in comic form. Joshua Lirriper, on the point of being arrested, tries to extort money from Emma through a note in which she recalls he offers her “the choice between thirty shillings in hand and his brains

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<sup>40</sup> On Dickens and the nuisance of street musicians, see John M. Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 60–62; see also the note referring to Mrs Lirriper on page 172.

on the premises marked immediate and waiting for an answer. My dear it gave me such a dreadful turn to think of the brains of my poor dear Lirriper's own flesh and blood flying about the new oilcloth" (2, *Legacy*). As a prudent housekeeper, the terrors of Udolpho, as Henry James put it, are secondary in Emma's mind to the importance of preserving the newness of things. Joshua Lirriper's comic violent extremism, his affected calls of "rivet on my fetters!" and "[r]emove me to my vile dungeon" (2, *Legacy*), are reminiscent of Mr Micawber, who, mortified by the calls of his creditors, made his wife scream by "making motions at himself with a razor; but within half an hour afterwards, he would polish up his shoes with extraordinary pains, and go out, humming a tune with a greater air of gentility than ever."<sup>41</sup> On another occasion, the police are called to arrest Emma's maid Caroline who is attacking a guest:

Caroline downs with her hair my dear, screeches and rushes upstairs, I following as fast as my trembling legs could bear me, but before I got into the room the dinner cloth and pink and white service all dragged off upon the floor with a crash and the new married couple on their backs in the firegrate, him with the shovel and tongs and a dish of cucumber across him and a mercy it was summer-time. "Caroline" I says "be calm," but she catches off my cap and tears it in her teeth as she passes me, then pounces on the new married lady makes her a bundle of ribbons takes her by the two ears and knocks the back of her head upon the carpet Murder screaming all the time Policemen running down the street and Wozenham's windows (judge of my feelings when I came to know it) thrown up and Miss Wozenham calling out from the balcony with crocodile's tears "It's Mrs Lirriper been overcharging somebody to madness - she'll be murdered - I always thought so - Pleeseman save her!" My dear four of them and Caroline behind the chiffoniere attacking with the poker and when disarmed prize fighting with her double fists, and down and up and up and down and dreadful! (3, *Lodgings*)

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<sup>41</sup> Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 170; Michael Slater links Emma with Mrs Micawber in *Dickens and Women* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1983), 22.

Miss Wozenham's disingenuous calls to the "Pleeseman" suggests "policeman" and "please man," as both a call for help and a kind of affected and melodramatic appeal to the other sex. The unpunctuated flow of action with the present tense verbs and participles recreates the scene in motion, in a passage which is both memory and event, past and present, reflection and reaction. Indeed, the comic absurdity of this masterful account turns on Emma's misuse of grammar, portraying the event as something that has *already* happened, which enables her to reflect on the comically trifling details of the weather and the aside to her ongoing rivalry with Miss Wozenham, and as something *in the process* of taking place. The way the capitalised word "Murder" intrudes into the sentence that describes the struggle between the two women on the floor, encapsulates the way that Emma's momentary perceptions during the event (that her guest will be murdered) rupture her retrospective account, with all their original force. Emma's understated and entirely ineffectual verbal intervention, "be calm," materialises out of the melee like a caption from a silent film, too easily swept aside by the motion of the girl's rampage and the whirl of verbs. But its uselessness is at odds with Emma's narrative-making force. Thomas has pointed out that as Emma's stories progress towards the sentimental deathbed accounts of Peggy and Mr Edson, the style becomes more regular and less allusive.<sup>42</sup> This shift in pace and grammar, which Thomas notices but doesn't explore, corroborates the idea that what is distinctive in Emma's language is intimately bound up with her experiences as a landlady. Language and lodgings, selfhood and space, are bound together in these stories.

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<sup>42</sup> Deborah A. Thomas, "Dickens' Mrs Lirriper and the Evolution of a Feminine Stereotype," *Dickens Studies Annual* 6 (1977): 162.



The landlady is a fascinatingly liminal figure in Dickens's work. Like many of the others he is drawn to in his Christmas stories (the waiter, cheap jack, soldier, sailor, artist, child), she lives precariously on the borders of respectability. The need to take in lodgers was a clear "social indicator" throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, so in a literary sense it can be read as a kind of generalised short hand for social position, which the characters of the *Lirriper* stories constantly strain against.<sup>43</sup> Emma recalls an event shortly after the Major's arrival:

in what service he was I cannot truly tell you my dear whether Militia or Foreign, for I never heard him even name himself as Major but always simple "Jemmy Jackman" and once soon after he came when I felt it my duty to let him know that Miss Wozenham had put it about that he was no Major and I took the liberty of adding "which you are sir" his words were "Madam at any rate I am not a Minor, and sufficient for the day is the evil thereof" which cannot be denied to be the sacred truth, nor yet his military ways of having his boots with only the dirt brushed off taken to him in the front parlour every morning on a clean plate and varnishing them himself with a little sponge and a saucer and a whistle in a whisper so sure as ever his breakfast is ended . . . . (4-5, *Lodgings*)

The letter "M" thrusts itself upwards into capitals – Militia, Major, Miss, Madam, Minor – under the strain of the characters' struggles against minoriness, in this "minor" genre, towards the gentility that they consistently perform. The capital "W" of Wozenham looks, in this context, like a capsized "M" (which is exactly what happens to Miss Wozenham's finances). The letters mirror each other like a reflection in a puddle, as if to capture the ongoing tension between the two

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<sup>43</sup> Davidoff, "Separation," 69.

women about who might be looking down on whom. Like the Major's dual names, which denote both status and lowliness (a "jackman" was a name for a servant or retainer kept by a nobleman or landowner), the terms major and minor indicate in Dickens's story a pair of potential roles, like the Head Waiter, who must be Head or Tail.<sup>44</sup>

Despite the social marginality of the landlady, in Dickens's work she often wields significant power over her lodgers. His landladies, Mrs Bardell, Mrs Todgers, Mrs MacStinger, and the Billickin, are some of his most memorable, vividly described characters.<sup>45</sup> Mrs Bardell's lawsuit against Mr Pickwick was one of the most enduring moments of Dickens's fiction for Victorian readers. That Dickens tells Wills in 1864 that "Mrs Lirriper will be in your arms, I trust, two or three days hence" makes it sound as if Emma might become Mrs Bardell's fitting heir indeed by fainting into Wills' arms, as her predecessor had fainted into Pickwick's.<sup>46</sup> But Emma is both like and unlike Dickens's other landladies, and the landladies you find in Victorian fiction more generally. The figure of the landlady comes under frequent ridicule in magazine articles and short stories in the nineteenth century. She is described as intrusive and dishonest, leaving "nothing untouched, unrummaged, unpilfered."<sup>47</sup> In Thackeray's Christmas book, *Our Street* (1848), the narrator Michael Angelo Titmarsh makes a typical accusation against his landlady: "I know that you, you hawk-beaked, keen-eyed,

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<sup>44</sup> "jackman," entry 1, definition 1, *Oxford English Dictionary*, web, March 2015.

<sup>45</sup> Slater refers to "tyrannical Dickensian landladies" in *Dickens and Women*, 295.

<sup>46</sup> Pilgrim, 10:435.

<sup>47</sup> James Payn, "Lodgings," *Household Words*, no. 294 (November 10, 1855): 357.

sleepless, indefatigable old Mrs Cammysole, have read all my papers for these fifteen years.”<sup>48</sup> The “lodging-house cat” becomes a euphemism for landladies’ propensity to steal from their lodgers: “[t]hat mystical feline so partial to brandy, / Cold meat, Indian pickles, and white sugar candy.”<sup>49</sup> Emma’s description of a past lodger as the “tea-and-sugarest gentleman (for he weighed them both in a pair of scales every morning)” (3, *Lodgings*), would have been recognised as an allusion to the well-known stereotype. Emma suspects her neighbour and fellow landlady, Miss Wozenham, of keeping “two keys” (8, *Lodgings*) to allow her access to her lodgers’ rooms (a theory reinforced by the fact that her name sounds teasingly like “what’s in ’em”). It was one reviewer’s opinion that “if all London lodging-house keepers were more like Mrs Lirriper and less like Miss Wozenham, the sisterhood would become far more popular than they are.”<sup>50</sup>

If a tendency to pry is one of the pervasively noted qualities of the landlady, then talkativeness is the other. Dickens’s first fictional landlady, Mrs Tibbs, was “always talking.”<sup>51</sup> In their joint Christmas contribution for the 1850 Christmas Number, “Christmas in Lodgings,” William Blanchard Jerrold and Dickens’s sub-editor, Wills, described a young bachelor living in London lodgings, whose

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<sup>48</sup> William Makepeace Thackeray, “Our Street,” in *Christmas Books, Tales and Sketches*, vol. 22 of *The Complete Works* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 29.

<sup>49</sup> “We’re Nothing But Lodgers,” *Fun*, May 28, 1864.

<sup>50</sup> “London Correspondence,” *Belfast News-letter*, November 25, 1862.

<sup>51</sup> Charles Dickens, “The Boarding House,” in *Sketches by Boz and Other Early Papers, 1833-39*, vol. 1 of *The Dent Uniform Edition of Dickens’ Journalism*, ed. Michael Slater (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1994), 273.

landlady, as well as going through his things and helping herself to his supplies, gave him “her history from the time of her birth”:

I knew how she took the measles; the precise effect of her visit to a vaccine establishment; the origin of a scar over her left eye-brow; the income of her brother in Somersetshire; the number of kittens which her cat annually produced; the character she gave her last servant; and the fond affection she had lavished upon a brute of a husband.  
(296)

The landlady stands accused of a particularly tiresome, characteristically female kind of verbal detailism; one that fails to filter out the unnecessary, or establish a proper hierarchy of information. Naomi Schor has argued that the detail has traditionally been viewed in the light of a gendered discourse, which has characterised it as either effeminate and superfluous, or as mundane and domestic, and therefore properly the domain of women.<sup>52</sup> In connection with the landlady, detailed speech registers as a familiar verbal stereotype. However, in Emma’s case, details also have a particular function: they help her keep track of her lodgers’ preferences and personalities. Each past lodger is associated with a detail or two: Mr Betley, for instance, “had the parlours and loved his joke” (2, *Lodgings*); there had been a “certain person that had put his money in a hop business” (2, *Lodgings*); and a gentleman with “breakfast by the week but a little irritable and use of a sitting-room” (2, *Lodgings*). George Orwell famously remarked that Dickens’s style is characterised by the “*unnecessary detail*.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 4.

<sup>53</sup> George Orwell, “Charles Dickens,” in vol. 1 of *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968), 450.

Indeed, perhaps the linguistic economy of excess that is associated with women in general, and the landlady in particular, could be taken as a mark of stylistic continuity with the author himself.

Patricia Ingham identifies that, historically, conversation has been a key locus for the construction of femininity, and that from “at least the time of Shakespeare’s *Mistress Quickly* onwards, garrulous inconsequentiality has been seen as the hallmark of women speaking.”<sup>54</sup> Several contemporary reviewers rank Emma in company with Dickens’s other talkative women and their common predecessor in Shakespeare. One identifies her lineage as the famous misusers of language: Mrs Partington (the creation of Dickens’s American contemporary, Benjamin Shillaber), Mrs Malaprop, and Dickens’s own Mrs Gamp.<sup>55</sup> Some have even projected forwards, and seen her language as anticipating the flow of James Joyce’s Molly Bloom and the stream-of-consciousness narrative.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, Dickens’s historically poor reputation within feminist criticism is reflected in some of the arguments about women and language in his fiction. For Ingham, within this linguistic tradition, which speaks both to real life and to the theatre, Dickens’s women are exemplars of undesirable femininity – tending to monologue rather than dialogue, and thus to self-interest rather than the nurture of others and selflessness.<sup>57</sup> It is perhaps Emma’s resistance to this claim that led

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<sup>54</sup> Patricia Ingham, *Dickens, Women and Language* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 72.

<sup>55</sup> “Literature,” *Bell’s Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, December 3, 1864.

<sup>56</sup> Thomas, “Dickens’ Mrs Lirriper,” 162; Harry Stone, “Dickens and Interior Monologue,” *Philological Quarterly* 38 (1959): 57.

<sup>57</sup> Ingham, *Dickens, Women and Language*, 76.

Ingham to exclude her from her study on *Dickens, Women and Language*, which otherwise seems a remarkable omission, given that Emma is one of only four female narrators in Dickens's work. Similarly, Vlock has argued that the verbal "patter" of Dickens's widows and spinsters, including Emma, Mrs Nickleby, and Flora Finching, is intended to evoke derisive, or at best condescending laughter, and signifies verbally the character's own redundancy in a society fixated upon marriage and procreation.<sup>58</sup> In stark contrast to this, Thomas recognises Emma as the most sophisticated and sympathetic instantiation of this stereotype in Dickens's work; however, her suggestion that the reader's sympathy means that Emma's "foibles – her small jealousies, her uneducated mistakes, her rambling style of speaking – almost go unnoticed" undermines Dickens's very purposeful decision to call up this stereotype in the first place.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, Vlock's argument, that the codified speech markers of the widow or spinster identify her as eccentric precisely to nullify the content of her speech, misses the point that in Emma, Dickens was rewriting the very kind of literary-theatrical stereotyping of a lower class woman that Vlock is describing; a rewriting that filtered into the very language itself.

The inherent joke in Emma's narrative is that for much of it, (the exception being where she reproduces dialogue or allows the Major or Jemmy to take over the narrative, as in the concluding parts), her continuous flow of one-sided conversation shuts out other voices, just as the stereotypical real life landlady does with her incessant speech. Though it may call up this stereotype, her voice

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<sup>58</sup> Vlock, *Dickens, Novel Reading, and the Victorian Popular Theatre*, 102.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas, "Dickens' Mrs Lirriper," 162.

actually does something different; it draws us in. Chesterton wrote that “[t]here has been much broad farce against the lodging-house keeper: [Dickens] alone could have written broad farce in her favour.”<sup>60</sup> To write her, moreover to write as her, and to take her seriously, was an act of hospitality in itself. The first paragraph of the 1863 Number establishes the relationship between Emma and the reader as based upon the notion of interiority: “my dear, excuse the familiarity but it comes natural to me in my own little room when wishing to open my mind to those that I can trust” (1, *Lodgings*). This moment establishes the correlation between self and space that underpins the narrative, where interiority is both the domestic interior (“my own little room”) and an individual consciousness (“to open my mind”). Emma’s act of narrating means both opening her home and her mind to the reader, which draws a parallel between the nature of her home, both private and open to strangers, and her language which, as Harry Stone has pointed out, treads the line between speech and thought.<sup>61</sup> Although this ambiguity is often referred to as stereotypical garrulity, it serves a deeper function – a principle of hospitality, openness, and intimacy, which is exemplified by her idiomatic address to the reader, “my dear.” If full stops are like small thresholds between sentences, then their absence represents the openness of her house and her mind.<sup>62</sup> Open-mindedness in this case bridges the formal and the ethical, as the basis of narration, and as a position towards others. As a formal principle, then, garrulity has as much to do with the story’s ethical

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<sup>60</sup> Chesterton, *Criticisms and Appreciations*, 81.

<sup>61</sup> Stone, “Dickens and Interior Monologue,” 52–65.

<sup>62</sup> In a talk on Tennyson and the notion of “home,” Robert Douglas-Fairhurst noted that punctuation can function as a kind of threshold. “At Home with Tennyson” (University of York, 2014).

and moral centre, as with conjuring up a recognisable urban typology, and it certainly comes above enjoying an old joke at her expense.

Voice is deeply important to any reading of the *Lirriper* stories, as it is in almost all the Christmas Numbers. But it also has particular significance for Emma, and her comments on voice reveal what is, and what might be, at stake:

My poor Lirriper was a handsome figure of a man with a beaming eye and a voice as mellow as a musical instrument made of honey and steel, but he had ever been a free liver being in the commercial travelling line and travelling what he called a limekiln road – “a dry road, Emma my dear,” my poor Lirriper says to me “where I have to lay the dust with one drink or another all day long and half the night, and it wears me Emma . . . .”

He was a handsome figure of a man and a man with a jovial heart and a sweet temper, but if they [photographs] had come up then they never could have given you the mellowness of his voice, and indeed I consider photographs wanting in mellowness as a general rule and making you look like a new-ploughed field. (1, *Lodgings*)

The inability to reproduce Lirriper’s voice signifies a vulnerability that is almost, but never fully, effaced by Emma’s flow of speech.<sup>63</sup> The word mellow, which seems to recreate, in an almost onomatopoeic sense, the very softness it denotes, calls attention to the reconstructive effort of language to capture speech, whilst the impossible simile, “as a musical instrument made of honey and steel,” reinforces that this can never truly be achieved.<sup>64</sup> Dickens was clearly still thinking about this the next year when he created Doctor Marigold, a man who

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<sup>63</sup> Ingham underlines that certain threatening female characters are deprived of speech, in *Dickens, Women and Language*, 85.

<sup>64</sup> Andrews discusses the way that Dickens treated his own voice as an “instrument” to be trained for the public readings, in *Charles Dickens and His Performing Selves*, 183–84.



makes his living through his vocal style, who meditates on the limitations and potential of written language:

A man can't write his eye (at least *I* don't know how to), nor yet can a man write his voice, nor the rate of his talk, nor the quickness of his action, nor his general spicy way. But he can write his turns of speech, when he is a public speaker – and indeed I have heard that he very often does, before he speaks 'em. (8)

This passage speaks to the concerns that have driven modern critical thinking on the relationship between printed and spoken language, and highlights their complexity in its attempt to impart the spoken qualities of words into written language (the italicised “*I*” and colloquial “em”) even as it pronounces the impossibility of writing voice. Doctor Marigold isn't concerned with the displacement of voice by print, as Walter Benjamin was, or with the way that voice could penetrate print culture, as modern critics of Dickens have often remarked upon; Kreilkamp, for example, has questioned Benjamin's well-known assertion that the figure of the storyteller was displaced by modern print culture, by arguing that Victorian novels both lamented this loss and attempted to make up for it by powerfully incorporating voice into their pages.<sup>65</sup> Rather, Marigold is interested in what is absolutely unique and unrepresentable in voice. However, for Emma, voice is connected with a sense of loss, a loss which modern technology – photography, rather than print – is unable to mitigate.<sup>66</sup> Dickens was a public speaker; he spoke at dinners, charity events, and of course, performed his own work at his reading tours. Indeed, towards the end of his life,

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<sup>65</sup> Kreilkamp, *Voice and the Victorian Storyteller*, 5.

<sup>66</sup> See Kreilkamp on voice and loss, *ibid.*, 8.

as members of the public were flocking to hear him read his own work, he may also have wondered how much of a voice could be captured in writing, and what was going to remain of his own voice. The technology that would record and play back sound would be invented not long after Dickens's death. The humour in Emma's technological naivety may mask a real longing; a fear about mortality centred on an aspect of the self that photographs could not preserve beyond the grave. The written word may not be able to call up the tone and quality of a voice, but with Emma Lirriper, the richness of her language, ringing with rhyme and alliteration, and wringing every last drop of meaning, attempts to make up for this.

There is both humour and poignancy in the way Dickens incorporates these ideas about voice in the narrative of one of his most prolific speakers. One of the other ongoing jokes of Emma's narrative (perhaps gently at her expense) is that her loquacity is seen as continually under threat. She states, acknowledging the negative reputation of landladies, that "[w]hat you lay yourself open to my dear in the way of being the object of uncharitable suspicions when you go into the Lodging business I have not the words to tell you" (4, *Lodgings*); when she follows Peggy towards the river, she says she was "[s]o fearful of losing sight of her that it almost stops my breath while I tell it" (7, *Lodgings*); she refers to her "inexpressible feelings" when Jemmy went missing (9, *Lodgings*); omits the details of her reconciliation with her old enemy with the statement "[i]t doesn't signify a bit what a talkative old body like me said to Miss Wozenham" (5, *Legacy*); and says that "there are not expressions in Johnson's Dictionary to state" (3, *Legacy*) how she felt when the Major and Mr Buffle, the tax inspector, passed each other in the street after their quarrel. The latter

phrase seems to suggest not that her feelings are entirely inexpressible, but that they defy expression in the standard idiom offered by Johnson's, which, as Johnson's preface stated, aimed to exclude temporary or mutable "fugitive cant" in favour of a fixed, "durable" language.<sup>67</sup> As an instrument in the service of codifying the vocabulary and grammar of the language, with emphasis on its written form, it is perhaps little wonder that it fails to meet Emma's rhetorical needs. Most poignantly among the moments where spoken language seems to fail is when Peggy loses her ability to speak in the moments before her death: "[s]he said something to me that had no sound in it, but I saw she asked me: 'Is this death?'" (8, *Lodgings*). Given the centrality of voice in this story, which was reinforced by the absence of illustrations to accompany the original publication, Emma herself is very sensitive to moments in which voice is entirely absent. At times when language seems on the verge of failing, a silent, intuitive kind of communication takes over, which comes through in her description of Peggy: "I don't know how to tell it right, but I saw her soul brighten and leap up, and get free and fly away in the grateful look" (8, *Lodgings*). Like Lizzie Hexam, who gently presides over Betty Higden as she dies, Emma is able to "translate conversation into an exchange deeper than disabled speech."<sup>68</sup> Dickens puts this mysterious, voiceless kind of communication in the command of a woman who belongs, in profession and vocal style, to a literary and social class famous for unsubtle, unsophisticated, excessive speech. Hers is a voice which is aware of its own frailty, as well as exercising its creative potential. Even in her expression of

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<sup>67</sup> "The Preface to *A Dictionary of the English Language*," in *Johnson's Dictionary: An Anthology*, ed. David Crystal (London: Penguin, 2005), 37.

<sup>68</sup> Garrett Stewart, *Death Sentences: Styles of Dying in British Fiction* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1984), 12.

uncertainty, “I don’t know how to tell it right,” there is a gentle iambic cadence which augments her imperfect speech, whilst it expresses that other, higher forms of communication are at work. From lost voices to soundless speech, saying something with no sound in it could be a description for writing, particularly the kind of writing that Dickens was doing in the Christmas Numbers.

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Never in trouble for long, Emma’s speech is characterised by turns and returns, asides and repetition. This passage about chimneys is both a characteristic digression and provides an unexpected figure for Emma’s bizarre and surprising associations:

And what I says speaking as I find of those new metal chimneys all manner of shapes (there’s a row of ’em at Miss Wozenham’s lodging-house lower down on the other side of the way) is that they only work your smoke into artificial patterns for you before you swallow it and that I’d quite as soon swallow mine plain, the flavour being the same . . . . (1, *Legacy*)

Emma may be disparaging of the poorly laid chimney pots which send smoke “down your throat in a straight form or give it a twist before it goes there,” or Miss Wozenham’s newfangled ones that work it “into artificial patterns” (1, *Legacy*). This intake of smoke, however, is the reverse of her own narrative exhalation, in which syntax and grammar are worked into unusual patterns, and meaning given a twist. Her circumlocutionary style is much more than a gesture

towards a literary tradition of garrulous women; it is a response to, and is structured by, her experiences as a landlady, both monotonous and unpredictable, full of returns and sudden turns. Her very way of thinking is framed in terms that are inextricable from her role: “a thought which I think must have been going about looking for an owner somewhere dropped into my old noddle if you will excuse the expression” (12, *Lodgings*). She provides a home to these stray thoughts, like the waifs and strays wandering the city, and the orphan infant whose mother had strayed.

Rather than linear temporality, association governs Emma’s thought processes, which creates a narrative which shifts itself through time and space, as she brings her thoughts back to subjects she had begun and unwittingly strayed from, for example, “[b]ut it was about the Lodgings that I was intending to hold forth” (2, *Lodgings*), or “[g]irls as I was beginning to remark” (2, *Lodgings*). She apologises for her style, which always seems to be going astray, stating “I did fully intend to have come straight to it only one thing does so bring up another” (6, *Legacy*), but it is also part of the conversational art she has acquired for the role: she coaxes the Major out of a bad mood in the “artfullest” way as “it is of no use going straight at a man who mopes” (12, *Lodgings*). Indeed, Emma’s storytelling is rarely straight to the point, but repeatedly arcs away from the story at hand. In one anecdote Emma recalls a gift that she received from an old employee, but the memory is overtaken by an exasperated digression about the delivery boy: an “impertinent young sparrow of a monkey whistling with dirty shoes on the clean steps and playing the harp on the Airy railings with a

hoop-stick" (4, *Lodgings*).<sup>69</sup> Similarly, when she goes to see Miss Wozenham, whose business has been repossessed, she describes that

Upon my calling her my dear Miss Wozenham breaks out a crying most pitiful, and a not unfeeling elderly person that might have been better shaved in a nightcap with a hat over it offering a polite apology for the mumps having worked themselves into his constitution, and also for sending home to his wife on the bellows which was in his hand as a writing-desk, looks out of the back parlour and says "The lady wants a word of comfort" and goes in again. (5, *Legacy*)

These moments which are typical of Emma's style, in a formal sense, are also about another meaning of the word style, in that they concern self-presentation: from the importance of a clean front step, to her delicate assessment of the elderly person's appearance. But they are also perhaps about a complete lack of a conscious attempt at controlling style; about a narrative that flows so freely that it borders thought, and retains that essence of the unedited and momentary.

Twists and turns sometimes come unbidden: she is given a "dreadful turn" (2, *Legacy*) by Joshua Lirriper, a "turn for the better" and a "turn for the worse" (48, *Legacy*) when Jemmy almost guesses his secret history, and the Major's method of teaching Jemmy mathematics makes her head "spin round and round and round" (10, *Lodgings*). The rhythm of Emma's life is structured by cyclical activity and concerns: the perennial problem of what girls to employ, the reckless brother-in-law who keeps coming back to ask for money, the visits of the assessed taxes man, and the return of the "Wandering Christians," people who "revolv[e] round London . . . about twice a year" (2, *Lodgings*). Returns mean

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<sup>69</sup> This is a more elaborate version of Christopher's finicky description of the person who brings him the proofs in *Somebody's Luggage* – a "a young man in a cap, of an intelligent countenance though requiring his hair cut" (46).

predictable monotony, but they can sometimes mean surprise. The climax of the second *Lirriper* story, for example, is the return of Jemmy's runaway, and now dying, father into their lives. Emma's language is also full of repetition. In some cases it seems to reproduce the redundant repetition of a literary stereotype, as when she "says to the Major, 'Major'" (1, *Legacy*). But when she refers to the "green green waving grass" (2, *Lodgings*) of her husband's grave, the repeated word is not redundant or comic, on the contrary, it creates a scansion that sounds almost like verse, and slows to a poignant silence. We are close to the territory of the "green graves" of the young described near the end of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, or perhaps even when Falstaff, at the end of his life, was reported to have "a babbled of green fields."<sup>70</sup> Indeed, a kind of mournful echolalia resounds through some of the more sombre moments of Emma's narrative. Emma says of Peggy "[s]he had a grateful look in her eyes that never never never will be out of mine until they are closed in my last sleep" (8, *Lodgings*). Similarly, Emma says "[n]ever never never, shall I forget the fair bright face of our boy when he stood at the foot of the bed, looking at his unknown father" (10, *Legacy*), whom Peggy had called "wicked, wicked, wicked!" (7, *Lodgings*), and whom Emma herself had called a "wicked wicked man!" before imploring him to be repentant with a cry of "O man, man, man!" (9, *Legacy*). As a remark upon the preserving powers of memory, Emma's repetition of "never" is a poignant counterpoint to King Lear's lament over Cordelia's corpse, "Thou'lt come no

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<sup>70</sup> Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, 544; William Shakespeare, *King Henry V*, ed. Andrew Gurr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 114, line 14.

more, / Never, never, never, never, never.”<sup>71</sup> This is powerful territory for Dickens. Emma’s “never” is poised between a “never to be forgotten misery” – Dickens’s phrase for his time at the blacking factory – and a relationship to the past that is emotionally sustaining.<sup>72</sup>

Repetition suggests a kind of excess, perhaps the emotional excess of melodrama or sentiment, or perhaps the verbal excess of talkativeness. But in fact, Emma gets the most out of language, teasing out its double meanings as if to make up for the other deficiencies of her life: the want of money, the loss of her husband, her negligent landlord – “not a half a pound of paint to save his life nor so much my dear as a tile upon the roof though on your bended knees,” (1, *Lodgings*). Puns are a form of linguistic economy, drawing double the meaning from a single word, for example, in Emma’s criticism of Miss Wozenham:

and as to airy bedrooms and a night-porter in constant attendance the less said the better, the bedrooms being stuffy and the porter stuff. (1, *Lodgings*)

The compression from stuffy to stuff is particularly appropriate, as it realises Emma’s own suggestion that “the less said the better.” Puns also allow her to tell two stories concurrently, in this case about girls and about teeth:

Girls as I was beginning to remark are one of your first and your lasting troubles, being like your teeth which begin with convulsions and never cease tormenting you from the time you cut them till they cut you, and then you don’t want to part with them which seems hard but we must all succumb or buy artificial . . . (2, *Lodgings*)

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<sup>71</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Lear*, ed. Jay L. Halio (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 262, lines 281–82.

<sup>72</sup> Forster, *Life*, 1873, 1:53.



The analogy between girls and teeth seems eccentric at first; but in fact, the image of a disintegrating body fits rather well with an analogy that loses its coherence and comes apart as it goes on. At other points, the loss of grammatical coherence means that the lines between people and objects become blurred, with rather strange effects, for example, in her description of her husband's death. He was a commercial traveller, and his weariness on the road

led to his running through a good deal and might have run through the turnpike too when that dreadful horse that never would stand still for a single instant set off, but for its being night and the gate shut and consequently took his wheel my poor Lirriper and the gig smashed to atoms and never spoke afterwards. (1, *Lodgings*)

Emma jumbles the expected grammatical syntax of the sentence. Shifting the affectionate phrase "my poor Lirriper," which comically doubles as a reminder of his misfortune, but also his poverty and his many debts, out of its logical position, (which would be "and my poor Lirriper never spoke afterwards"), has the effect of making it sound as if it were the gig which "never spoke afterwards," rather than the man. There are also subtle puns here – the "spoke" being part of a wheel, and the notion that poor Lirriper was always "running through" money, as well as the turnpike.

Sudden shifts in direction, disappearing objects, and double meanings in the language convey the unpredictability and financial instability of the life of a lodging-house keeper. The stories, which begin in 1863 with the debt left by Emma's husband, and end in 1864 with a legacy left to her by another man altogether, are deeply concerned with money. Every significant character is mentioned in relation to money: they borrow it, bequeath it, avoid parting with it, fantasise about it, extort it, but mostly they just lack it. Her neighbour and

rival, Miss Wozenham, falls into debt and declares to Emma “I have not a friend in the world who is able to help me with a shilling” (5, *Legacy*). Emma’s sensitivity towards the Major’s pecuniary embarrassment prevents her from dealing with the subject of his money plainly: she censors the details of his unpredictable rent payments to “irregularity which I will not particularly specify in a quarter which I will not name” (5, *Lodgings*), and she both names and doesn’t name the problem when she confides in her reader that she wishes he was better off “L. S. D.-ically” (9, *Lodgings*).<sup>73</sup> Even propriety itself is evoked in financial terms. Offended by the failure of Mr Buffle, the tax inspector, to remove his hat, the Major exclaims that “there are two quarters of the Gallantry Taxes due and the Collector has called” (3, *Legacy*). Despite his gallantry, Emma’s narrative evokes a world of profligate men: Lirriper had been “behindhand with the world” (1, *Lodgings*) and Emma opened her lodgings partly to pay his debts and restore his good name; Lirriper’s younger brother, Joshua, coaxes Jemmy into parting with his pocket money and regularly extorts money from Emma; and Jemmy’s father abandoned his pregnant mother leaving her completely unable to support herself, had Emma not written off her outstanding rent.

Jemmy has intuited the financial uncertainty of their life, clinging hopefully to the edge of petit-bourgeois stability and respectability. He is associated with “fortune” – both in terms of money and the sense of chance that seems to govern the ups and downs of the world he lives in, and his stories, which conclude the two Numbers, are explicitly concerned with money. The first, from the 1863 Number, is a fantasy of riches in which the young protagonist,

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<sup>73</sup> See Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, 581. Mr Boffin pretends to accuse John Rokesmith of being more concerned with “*£s. d.*” than with Bella.

based on himself, goes to seek his fortune.<sup>74</sup> On his return he “filled the cupboard and the bookcase with gold, and he showered it out on his Gran and his godfather” (48, *Lodgings*). There was so much money it could never be spent, which connects Jemmy’s story to that of Fortunatus and his magical self-replenishing purse, given to him by the goddess Fortune. Indeed, Emma describes him, clutching his leather moneybag, as “like a little Fortunatus with his purse” (7, *Legacy*), as they prepare for their trip to France. The story to end the 1864 Number, which Jemmy states will be his version of the life of Mr Edson (the dying man he little realises is his own father), concerns a wealth-obsessed father who forbids his son to marry a woman without money, that son’s disinheritance, and the couple’s subsequent failed attempt to seek their fortunes in London. The recognition the *Lirriper* stories give to the “irregularity” of financial life speaks to the argument made by Elizabeth A. Campbell, that Dickens’s novels associated the idea of fortune, in the economic sense, with the unpredictability and chance attributed to Fortune, the goddess of prosperity.<sup>75</sup> Dickens increasingly used the image of Fortune’s wheel, Campbell suggests, as a way of thinking about time as cyclical, as eternal return, which was also, in the nineteenth century, implicitly associated with the feminine.<sup>76</sup> The *Lirriper* stories are a nexus point for these ideas: the cycles of the Wandering Christians, the

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<sup>74</sup> See Charles Dickens, “Gone Astray,” in “*Gone Astray*” and *Other Papers from Household Words, 1851-59*, vol. 3 of *The Dent Uniform Edition of Dickens’ Journalism*, ed. Michael Slater (London: J. M. Dent, 1998), 144–65. The child in this sketch, perhaps Dickens himself, on finding himself lost decides to seek his fortune in the city.

<sup>75</sup> Elizabeth A. Campbell, *Fortune’s Wheel: Dickens and the Iconography of Women’s Time* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003), 5.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

constant recognition of the economic concerns which motivate their everyday lives, the appearance of a little Fortunatus. The home is far from a haven detached from the economic business of public life: here it is a place where children dream of providing their parents with endless riches, and parents resent the landlord and fall out with the taxman.<sup>77</sup>

Through Jemmy, the concept of Fortune links reading the Christmas Number with other forms of popular entertainment. Before he reads the stories collected by the Major aloud, he announces “[n]ow then! I’m going to read. Once, twice, three and away. Open your mouths and shut your eyes, and see what Fortune sends you. All in to begin. Look out Gran. Look out Godfather!” (10, *Legacy*). In this Dickens rewrites a phrase attributed to Aristophanes, “[o]pen your mouth and shut your eyes and see what Zeus shall send you,” which was mentioned in *Imaginary Conversations* by Walter Savage Landor, a friend of Dickens who had died in September of that year.<sup>78</sup> Jemmy’s version replaces the phrase’s original invocation of divine providence in favour of the unpredictable but potentially rewarding will of Fortune. That Jemmy introduces the contributed stories this way is perhaps a sly allusion to what Dickens saw as the rather unpredictable quality of the contributions that he received each year.<sup>79</sup> But Jemmy’s announcement also calls up the showmanship of the fair. In one of

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<sup>77</sup> Bowen discusses the way economic concerns pervade domestic business in *Other Dickens*, chap. 4.

<sup>78</sup> Walter Savage Landor, *Imaginary Conversations of Greeks and Romans*, vol. 2 of *The Complete Works of Walter Savage Landor* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1927), 22.

<sup>79</sup> On Dickens’s disappointment see for example, *Pilgrim*, 7:475; and *Pilgrim*, 9:169-70.

Dickens's early sketches, "Greenwich Fair," he describes Richardson's travelling theatre.<sup>80</sup> The theatre manager would entice the crowds in with a shout of "[a]ll in to begin," where they could watch a "melodrama (with three murders and a ghost), a pantomime, a comic song, an overture, and some incidental music, all done in five and twenty minutes."<sup>81</sup> This phrase associates Jemmy with the kinds of public entertainment that Dickens enjoyed as a child, but also with the persona of child performer. As Dickens's youthful capacity for songs and stories led one of his godfather's friends to call him a "progidy," so the Major exclaims proudly of Jemmy, an adept storyteller, who also transforms the details of his own life into fiction, "[h]e is a boy . . . that has not his like on the face of the earth" (11, *Lodgings*).<sup>82</sup> This golden child, an accomplished performer, a lover of the theatre, is preoccupied with money, but is also described figuratively as an unending source of wealth – a boy with a bottomless purse. He restores to Emma (if only through his stories) the wealth denied her by other men. We might think here of another woman, to whom some critics have already likened Emma – Dickens's mother, Elizabeth – who had died in 1863 and, despite her senility, had during one visit, "plucked up a spirit and asked [him] for 'a pound'!"<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Schlicke, *Dickens and Popular Entertainment*, see note on page 253.

<sup>81</sup> Charles Dickens, "Greenwich Fair," in *Sketches by Boz and Other Early Papers, 1833-39*, vol. 1 of *The Dent Uniform Edition of Dickens' Journalism*, ed. Michael Slater (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1994), 117; see also 116.

<sup>82</sup> Forster, *Life*, 1873, 1:21; Ackroyd suggests that the Major could be John Dickens talking about his son in *Dickens*, 936.

<sup>83</sup> Pilgrim, 9:342. On the connection between Emma and Elizabeth Dickens, see Thomas, "Dickens' Mrs Lirriper," 166; and Slater, *Dickens and Women*, 22.

*Somebody's Luggage* began with a neglectful mother, one who may have administered to her son that "healthful sustenance which is the pride and boast of the British female constitution" (1), in a reference to breastfeeding which recalls Mrs Micawber, whose twins are constantly "taking refreshment," but who starved Christopher of other kinds of motherly nourishment.<sup>84</sup> Like Milly Swidger from *The Haunted Man*, Emma is a mother who is not a mother: "O why were you never a mother when there are such mothers as there are!" (4, *Lodgings*) Emma's maid exclaims to her. Many of the Christmas Number stories see the conventional units of married couple and biological family as potentially hostile. Thirty-seven of the stories are concerned with marriage, and of this, less than half end well for the couple. Indeed, whereas serial novels are particularly adept for describing the gradual progression of a courtship which leads eventually to marriage and children, the short form is perhaps better suited to exploring the hastily contracted, ill-conceived marriages and disastrous courtships that crop up in them so frequently.<sup>85</sup> In Eliza Lynn's "The Sixth Poor Traveller" (*SPT*), the narrator's marriage breaks down when her husband murders her sister, with whom he was in love. In both "The Manchester Marriage" (*HTL*) by Gaskell and Procter's poem, "The Old Sailor's Story" (*WGM*), women remarry believing their husbands dead, only for the original husbands to miraculously return. The bride-to-be in Sala's "The Ghost in the Double Room" (*THH*) calls off the engagement when her husband starts suffering with the ague,

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<sup>84</sup> Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 168.

<sup>85</sup> Hughes and Lund, *The Victorian Serial*, 17.

which she and her family misinterpret as drunkenness. Rosa Mulholland's Irish tale (*DMP*) ends with a couple plunging off a cliff to their deaths, after a love potion causes a woman to go mad. Blackmail and violence characterise the marriage at the centre of Mrs Gascoyne's "To Be Taken and Tried" (*DMP*).

Parents fail children, and children reject parents: in Gaskell's "The Old Nurse's Story" (*RS*), a father turns a daughter who has displeased him and her child away into the snow, where they perish; in Henry Spicer's contribution to *Mrs Lirriper's Legacy*, a miserly grandfather keeps his vast wealth a secret from everyone, and chooses instead to keep himself and his granddaughter in extreme poverty; Eliza Griffiths's "The Mother's Story" (*RS*) concerns a daughter's rejection of her mother, on the grounds of her race; and in another of Gaskell's stories, "The Ghost in the Garden Room" (*THH*), a thankless son attempts to burgle his parents when he runs into financial difficulty, the shock of which leads to his mother's death. The failure of familial feeling is also a failure of hospitality, in the case of Rosa Mulholland's contribution to *Mrs Lirriper's Legacy*, where a "Past Lodger Relates His Experience as a Poor Relation," in which a man opens his home to his cousin and takes in a local girl out of charity, only to treat them both with scorn or indifference.

As Waters has suggested, Dickens's fiction often contains families that are memorable precisely because of "their grotesque failure to exemplify the domestic ideal."<sup>86</sup> Dickens's are perhaps the strangest domestic situations found in the Christmas Numbers. In Christopher's story for *Somebody's Luggage*, his parents' marriage is a secret. Even stranger, perhaps, is Dickens's tale of Richard

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<sup>86</sup> Waters, *Dickens and the Politics of the Family*, 27.

Doubledick from the first part of *The Seven Poor Travellers*, in which Richard runs away to join the army after Mary Marshall breaks off their courtship. There, he establishes an intense attachment to his captain, his “guardian angel” (6), who dies in his arms in battle. The eventual marriage of Richard to Mary takes place while he is in a semi-conscious state and expected to die; when he lives, he doesn’t immediately remember it having taken place at all – about as unusual a version of the courtship plot as Dickens ever wrote. Doctor Marigold’s marriage is probably the most dysfunctional of the entire Christmas Number opus, by any author. He persuades his future wife to accept a wedding ring in his best Cheap Jack patter, and what it lacks in romance it makes up for in humour: “[n]ow what else is it? It’s a man-trap and a handcuff, the parish stocks and a leg-lock, all in gold and all in one. Now what else is it? It’s a wedding ring” (3). One has to wonder who Doctor Marigold was trying to persuade – her or himself. Their unconventional living arrangement is seemingly key to the disastrous course of their marriage:

Thirteen year of temper in a Palace would try the worst of you, but thirteen year of temper in a Cart would try the best of you. You are kept so very close to it in a cart, you see. There’s thousands of couples among you, getting on like sweet ile upon a whetstone in houses five and six pairs of stairs high, that would go to the Divorce Court in a cart. Whether the jolting makes it worse, I don’t undertake to decide, but in a cart it does come home to you and stick to you. Wiolence in a cart is so wiolent, and aggrawation in a cart is so aggrawating. (4)

This statement on the contingency between space and behaviour speaks to Woloch’s schema for character and space in Dickens’s novels: the more constricted the space in the narrative that the character occupies, the more



extreme their characteristics.<sup>87</sup> Violence is *more* violent, the smaller the space. Indeed, his wife habitually beats their daughter, who becomes sick and dies. She eventually dies herself by drowning, perhaps suicide.

Despite the effectiveness of these short, shocking domestic disaster stories, Dickens was more intrigued by the perspectives that became available when the driving force of the narrative was not the marriage plot: the perspectives of children, travellers, spinsters, bachelors, widows, and widowers. Holly Furneaux has seen the *Lirriper* stories as an example of Dickens's life-long preoccupation with unconventional lifestyles and with elective families – families based on platonic partnerships and adoption, which aren't assimilable to the conventional categories and oppositions of biological and romantic unions.<sup>88</sup> In this context, the twists and turns of Emma's narrative, the digressions, asides, surprising emphases, might be taken to represent, stylistically, the story's commitment to relationships that come outside conventional genealogical and biological categories, which have long been closely associated with the linear form of the novel; that is, the slightly haphazard and chaotic meetings, adoptions, and coincidences which are apt to occur in a home which is open to strangers. Margaret Oliphant describes the ephemerality of relationships such as these in her 1894 novel, *A House in Bloomsbury*, set in a lodging-house, when she describes the relationship between an elderly woman and the young daughter of a fellow lodger, of whom she was fond: "[t]hey were, in fact, nothing to each other – brought together, as we say, by chance, and as likely to be whirled apart

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<sup>87</sup> Woloch, *One Versus the Many*, 178.

<sup>88</sup> Holly Furneaux, *Queer Dickens: Erotics, Families, Masculinities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 63–64.

again by those giddy combinations and dissolutions which the head goes round only to think of.”<sup>89</sup> The *Lirriper* stories acknowledge this sense of flux, for example with the Wandering Christians, “revolving round London” (2, *Lodgings*), but they also want to present the possibility for something permanent. Such is the strength of the non-biological relationships in the *Lirriper* stories, that Jemmy tells Emma, his adoptive grandmother, “you have been more than father – more than mother – more than brothers sisters friends – to me!” (11, *Lodgings*), indicating the extent to which conventional roles can be entirely exceeded.

There is also another type of nurturing relationship being played out. The sincere moral imperative underpinning Emma’s hospitality means that her lodging-house – an establishment often seen culturally as the poor relation of the single family home, and a disreputable one at that – gains in Dickens’s Christmas story a more stable moral function: it becomes rather more like Dickens’s own philanthropic project, Urania Cottage, a refuge for weak, vulnerable, or troubled young women, with Emma at its centre. Both Numbers for 1863 and 1864 include stories by female authors (Gaskell and Stretton) that focus on sexual rivalry between women that involves the intervention (through murder and kidnap) of an older woman, for the benefit of her favourite.<sup>90</sup> This is a distinct departure from the figure of the self-sacrificing sister angel of, for example, Eliza Lynn’s “The Old Lady’s Story” (*ARS*), or Procter’s poem for *A House to Let*. These stories by women, portray a version of womanhood that undermines solidarity

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<sup>89</sup> Margaret Oliphant, *A House in Bloomsbury* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1894), 1:112.

<sup>90</sup> Gaskell’s “How the First Floor Went to Crowley Castle” (*Lodgings*) and Hesba Stretton’s “Another Past Lodger Relates Certain Passages to Her Husband” (*Legacy*).

between women in the service of the heterosexual marriage plot; in doing so, they refuse to live up to the image of the nurturing older woman that Dickens's framing material puts forward, offering scenarios that are more idiosyncratic, perhaps, but also destructive. Indeed for Gaskell, as Elsie Michie has suggested, to be a woman was to occupy an almost "scandalous" public position, making Dickens's journal a kind of "refuge," but one in which her dealings with the editor have been repeatedly characterised as a kind of "waywardness."<sup>91</sup> Dickens's vision of womanhood in Emma, who presides over her wayward employees, though hardly utopian, is distinctly benevolent.

Urania Cottage was a joint philanthropic venture with heiress Angela Burdett Coutts, which provided temporary residence and domestic training to young women who came to them from the street, or via the workhouse or the authorities, before helping them begin a new life in the British colonies. There is an echo of this real-life solution in Emma's interventions. Upon Caroline Maxey's release from prison Emma brings her "a morsel of jelly . . . to give her a mite of strength to face the world again" (4, *Lodgings*); she looks after Peggy, the young pregnant runaway; she even helps Sophy emigrate to Australia, which was the main destination for the Urania Cottage tenants (3, *Lodgings*).<sup>92</sup> As part of his role at the women's home, Dickens conducted private interviews with the women and wrote down their histories into a case book.<sup>93</sup> Emma's attitude

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<sup>91</sup> Elsie Michie, "'My Story as My Own Property': Gaskell, Dickens, and the Rhetoric of Prostitution," in *Outside the Pale: Cultural Exclusion, Gender Difference, and the Victorian Woman Writer* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 82–85.

<sup>92</sup> Hartley, *Charles Dickens and the House of Fallen Women*, 126.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 131–41.

towards Peggy seems to echo this relationship, in that she seeks to keep Peggy's true history a secret. She refrains from reading the letter from Mr Edson which instigates Peggy's suicide attempt – "[m]y dear I never looked at the face of the letter which was lying open by her" (6, *Lodgings*). She even discourages Peggy's attempt to confess her story: "[n]o my dear not now, you had best not try to do it now. Wait for better times when you have got over this and are strong, and then you shall tell me whatever you will." (8, *Lodgings*). However, the fact that Emma refers to Peggy as "Jemmy's young unmarried mother" (9, *Legacy*) in the 1864 Number suggests that a conversation may have taken place that is withheld from narration. Even Jemmy has "ever had kept from him the cruel story of his poor pretty young mother" (1, *Legacy*), and believes himself an orphan, and Emma his biological grandmother. These moments both highlight people's shame, and save them from it: naming and not naming the Major's financial irregularities, naming and not naming Peggy's indiscretion. On the one hand, we might read the suppression of Peggy's story as a note of moral conservatism, in a story which otherwise presents a rather different version of a familiar and unflattering stereotype. Perhaps the sacrifice for giving one marginalised woman a voice is keeping another one silent. On the other hand, Jemmy's father, too, has a "secret history" (10, *Legacy*), one we never learn. Jemmy becomes a storyteller in place of his silenced parents, and in one of his stories he imaginatively rewrites Mr Edson's history and therefore, unwittingly, his own. This is a significant gesture, for the decision to repress Jemmy's secret history frees him from the burden of his father's mistake and his mother's pain, and opens up the possibility for him to forge his own social identity; perhaps as a storyteller.

The mystery of the “unknown Englishman,” who lies “speechless and without motion” (6, *Legacy*) in the town of Sens, causes Emma to travel to France to discover his identity. Marcus has shown that the ongoing debate about housing in England which sought to both denigrate and reform lodging-houses, sometimes pitted French and English models of living against each other: namely, the Parisian apartment building, with its communal areas and multiple residents, and the English single-family home.<sup>94</sup> Where France and the French appear in the Christmas Numbers it is almost exclusively in a negative light (except in Dickens’s stories, and one by Sala for *The Seven Poor Travellers*).<sup>95</sup> It is in relation to the home, domesticity, and hospitality that France represents a particular threat. An especially strange and sinister take on French hospitality comes in Charles Collins’s story for *Mrs Lirriper’s Legacy*, “A Past Lodger Relates a Wild Story of a Doctor.”<sup>96</sup> It concerns a Parisian doctor who was known for throwing lavish dinner parties, the catch being that “it was an understood thing that Dr Bertrand’s guests did not feel life to be all they could wish, and had no desire to survive the night which succeeded their acceptance of his graceful hospitality” (12, *Legacy*). The doctor would lace the courses with poison, just

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<sup>94</sup> Marcus, *Apartment Stories*, 86–87.

<sup>95</sup> Christmas Number stories that include a villainous Frenchman are Amelia B. Edwards’s, “How the Third Floor Knew the Potteries” (*Lodgings*), and Hesba Stretton’s “No. 4 Branch Line. The Travelling Post-Office” (*MJ*).

<sup>96</sup> *DJO* acknowledge that pages 15-34 are missing from the original scanned volume.

enough so that they would die in their sleep. Partaking in the doctor's hospitality here is equivalent to suicide; quite a different take on the Christmas feast that contemporary readers may have been looking forward to. In another story by Charles Collins, John Tredgear's tale in *A Message From the Sea*, a traveller in France stops reluctantly at a foreboding inn. He reassures himself before going inside that he is not in a French melodrama (15), yet the house seems in life, like some of the others he had stayed in, to be "that kind of tavern which has a very bad name in French books and French plays" (12). Before long he realises he has been poisoned by the landlord, but is rescued by a friend before worse can befall him. The exterior of the building is characterised by an off-putting sense of inhospitableness – "[e]verything seemed shut up" (13) – but the interior is worryingly permeable, as if in its construction it has been set up for watching guests rather than ensuring their privacy. He continually finds his landlord looking at him through a set of glass doors, or "peering at [him] through the muslin curtains" (16). In a similar story for a regular Number of *Household Words*, Edmund Saul Dixon, a Christmas Number contributor, writes about a traveller to a French inn who discovers his landlord peeping down at him through the cracks in the floorboards above his head, through which he drops a noose in an attempt to hang him while he sleeps. The narrator's adaptation of the famous phrase, "[a] man's chamber in an inn ought to be his castle," emphasises that the desire for privacy and autonomy which were so tied up with notions of home, often failed to be realised in these temporary modes of living.<sup>97</sup> Wilkie Collins offers an even more sensational account of the bad French inn in "A

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<sup>97</sup> Edmund Saul Dixon, "A Midsummer Night's Lodging," *Household Words*, no. 176 (August 6, 1853): 551.

Terribly Strange Bed,” published in *Household Words* in 1852, in which the proprietor of a particularly dubious Parisian lodging-house has installed a sinister mechanism inside a four-poster bed in one of his rooms so that the canopy may descend, silently, on top of the occupant and suffocate them as they sleep.<sup>98</sup>

Dixon’s paraphrase of the famous saying evoking the English sense of home and repeated references to France suggests that there is a sense of national identity at stake. Gaskell’s contribution to *Mrs Lirriper’s Lodgings*, “How the First Floor Went to Crowley Castle,” set in the late eighteenth century, moves between an archaic model of English dwelling, and a modern French one.<sup>99</sup> Widower Mark Crowley takes his daughter Theresa to Paris where he hopes she will learn the attractive manners of the French elite. Leaving their English castle behind, they move into a Parisian apartment: “[t]he street itself is narrow, and now-a-days we are apt to think the situation close; but in those days it was the height of fashion . . . to inhabit an apartment in that street, was in itself a mark of a bon ton” (15-16).<sup>100</sup> In Paris, she secretly marries a “dissolute Adonis of the Paris saloons” (16-17). The castle and the apartment evoke starkly opposed cultural ideals and stereotypes: an overdetermined symbol of home and family, a literalisation of the clichéd phrase, rooted in history, patriarchy, and nationhood, signifying permanence and ancestry, against the allegedly dubious boundaries of the

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<sup>98</sup> Wilkie Collins, “A Terribly Strange Bed,” *Household Words*, no. 109 (April 24, 1852): 129–137.

<sup>99</sup> “Literature,” *Era*, December 13, 1863. The author of this review refers to Gaskell’s story as a “French tale,” despite it being only partly set in France, which could imply the generality of certain features.

<sup>100</sup> Charles Collins’s “Picking Up Evening Shadows” (*TTG*), describes close living in London, and the act of watching the lives of your neighbours.

French apartment and, in the context of the story, the associated lack of moral clarity. The French lifestyle shatters the English dream of home (helped not a little by a murderous maid that Theresa brings back with her to England), and the castle is sold out of the family.

The *Lirriper* stories are fascinated by border and threshold crossing as invitations or acts of reconciliation, for example, when Emma makes peace with Miss Wozenham by going into her home, or the Major bundles Mr Buffle and his family into Emma's lodgings after his house is destroyed by fire. Emma's troublesome brother-in-law makes a mockery of the significance of this kind of crossing when he wraps himself in Emma's doormat as a disguise from the police, who nevertheless arrest him in the hallway (2, *Legacy*). In the *Legacy*, one of these borders is that between England and France, which Dickens himself traversed so many times in his life.<sup>101</sup> Indeed, Emma's view of French domesticity is quite different to other fictional accounts: "I had formed quite a high opinion of the French nation and had noticed them to be much more homely and domestic in their families and far more simple and amiable in their lives than I had ever been led to expect" (47, *Legacy*). When Emma crosses the threshold of Miss Wozenham's house it is an act of humility and charity, but when she crosses the channel it is no less than spiritual: "[b]ut my dear the blueness and the lightness and the coloured look of everything and the very sentry-boxes striped and the shining rattling drums and the little soldiers with their waists and tidy gaiters, when we got across to the Continent – it made me feel as if I don't know what – as if the atmosphere had been lifted off me" (7, *Legacy*). The French

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<sup>101</sup> Slater points out that Dickens had visited Sens, perhaps with Ellen, in *Charles Dickens*, 528.



hospitality industry (described with disgust by the Missis of Mugby Junction) also far exceeds its English equivalent: “[a]nd as to lunch why bless you if I kept a man-cook and two kitchen-maids I couldn’t get it done for twice the money, and no injured young woman a glaring at you and grudging you and acknowledging your patronage by wishing that your food might choke you” (7, *Legacy*). French openness goes beyond mere etiquette, for “every soul about the hotel down to the pigeons in the court-yard made friends with Jemmy and the Major” (10, *Legacy*). That the only meeting of biological relations – Jemmy and his father – in either of the two *Lirriper* stories happens abroad, in Sens, and that Jemmy is kept from the knowledge of the dying man’s identity, highlights the estrangement of biological relations in the stories. At the same time, the French welcome of the Major and Jemmy is the performance of a kind of hospitality that, especially in contrast to the distance between father and son, emphasises the alternative kinds of relationships at work.

It is significant that at the opening of the first *Lirriper* story, Emma implies that lodgers are a necessary burden, wondering who “would begin to be worried with letting Lodgings that wasn’t a lone woman with a living to get” (1, *Lodgings*). The mundane, day-to-day responsibilities, brought out in the laborious articulation of this almost tongue-twister of a first line, are an unavoidable chore, driven by financial necessity, which is nevertheless occasionally overridden by a deeper sense of purpose. Given Dickens’s interest in the continuity between modes of being and modes of publishing, one might wonder whether editing the Christmas Number held the same dual significance for him: an ineluctable chore, a responsibility. The *Lirriper* stories are technically brilliant productions, which encode day-to-day experience into Emma’s

language, but also exceed in their subject the prosaic operations of hospitality, to stage, with mixed humour and sympathy, a more fundamental kind of hospitality: the encounter with the stranger and foreigner, the deserted young woman, the erring young man, the parentless child, the thankless relation, the rival who has lost all her money, the friend who never pays his way. Emma has the heart and capacity for sympathy of a true Dickensian heroine, but the everyday cares, foibles, and irritations of a woman much less saintly, though not less virtuous.

## Chapter 4 – Time and Repetition: *Mugby Junction* (1866)

Dickens's letters make frequent reference to time. He is continually anxious not to lose time, finds he has very little of it to spare, begins a letter in haste and must leave off abruptly, feels time pressing and must work tirelessly against it, wonders how it steals on, wills it forwards. The conscious marking of, apportioning out of, and reflecting on, time, is intimately connected in Dickens's life with work and productivity, with ageing, with the deaths of many friends and the birth of many children, with the beginnings and endings of stories, parts, and publications, with deadlines looming and being met. When the "story-demand" was upon him, strict time keeping was essential to Dickens's "health and success," with a fixed number of hours each day devoted to writing; a "bond," he told a friend, that is was "impossible" for him to break.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it was seemingly not only that Dickens wrung as much as he could out of every minute, day, and week, but that Time seemed to wring its worth out of *him*.

Dickens wrote four stories for *Mugby Junction*: "Barbox Brothers," "Barbox Brothers and Co.," "Main Line. The Boy at Mugby," and "No. 1 Branch Line. The Signalman." The "Barbox Brothers" stories and "The Signalman" speak simultaneously to a number of temporalities: obsessive dwelling on the past, the dramatic immediacy of the present moment, precision train time, the anniversary, haunting, compulsion, familial lineage, and the rupture of chronological time. There is perhaps no other single Dickens text with such a

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<sup>1</sup> Pilgrim, 9:345.

concentration of competing and coalescing time concerns as expressed in these linked stories. Encompassing two parts, the “Barbox Brothers” stories, which this chapter focuses on, tell a tale set around the railway, which begins with a train guard’s watch and ends with the striking of a clock upon a mantelpiece. The events that follow in between are concerned with bad beginnings and storybook endings, but most of all with things repeating and coming back, like memories and birthdays; a concern which finds a dark echo in “The Signaller,” the most well known and most studied of all Dickens’s Christmas Number stories.

As a material object, the “Extra Christmas Number” reveals its allegiance to certain temporal patterns. The word “Christmas” in the title indexes the growing significance of the Christmas literary market during the nineteenth century, which Dickens had helped so much to influence, initially with the Christmas Books, and later through these special journal issues. As Christmas came to rival spring as the foremost season for publishing, that word, “Christmas,” became a powerful marketing tool.<sup>2</sup> As one unimpressed reviewer of *Mugby Junction* pointed out, quoting an unnamed source from within the publishing industry, “people will buy anything at Christmas time, if you call it a Christmas publication.”<sup>3</sup> The image of this purchasing ritual calls up Benedict Anderson’s famous description of the power of the newspaper to transform an otherwise disparate group of people into a community of readers through a

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<sup>2</sup> Simon Eliot, “Some Trends in British Book Production, 1800-1919,” in *Literature in the Marketplace: Nineteenth-Century British Publishing and Reading Practices*, ed. John O. Jordan and Robert L. Patten (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 33-34; Tara Moore, *Victorian Christmas in Print* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 18-19.

<sup>3</sup> “London Correspondence,” *Trewman’s Exeter Flying Post or Plymouth and Cornish Advertiser*, December 12, 1866.

sense of simultaneity in time with each other.<sup>4</sup> The Christmas Number roused this community of readers, in ever greater numbers, and Dickens used the framing material, for the most part, to explore the idea of a group of strangers, brought together in time and space, for the acts of telling and listening to stories. The “Extra” in the title signifies that the Christmas Number stands outside the normal temporal rhythm of the periodical; it appeared as well as the regular weekly Numbers for December, a little like the arrhythmic double-beat of a heart galloping forward with excitement, or perhaps dread, in anticipation of the holiday. Christmas, of course, is itself a brief disruption of the usual rhythm and activity of working life. The “Extra” in the title also signifies a kind of munificence or excess, a literary treat, in keeping with the time of year, which indeed it was: as stated at the top of the cover pages, the *Household Words* Christmas issue contained one and a half times the pages of a regular issue, and the *All the Year Round* issue was twice the size. However, unlike the Christmas Books, the Christmas Number was not packaged as a Christmas gift. Indeed, Doctor Marigold sells the Christmas Number off to the reader at a bargain price: “[y]ou think Four Pound too much? And still you think so? Come! I’ll tell you what then. Say Four Pence, and keep the secret” (9). The Christmas Numbers are connected to both the ongoing temporality of the periodical market, and the burgeoning annual market, the singular production connected with the time of year.<sup>5</sup> The

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<sup>4</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 35.

<sup>5</sup> See the blog post by Jim Mussell “Part Three: Being Moved,” *Moving Things: Repetition and Circulation in Victorian Print Culture*, July 22, 2014, <http://jimmussell.com/2014/07/22/>; see also Beetham, “Towards a Theory of the Periodical as a Publishing Genre,” 26.

junction itself speaks to this duality, as the platform and tracks embody, respectively, a stage for the singular dramatic encounter, and the intention and teleology of the forward-moving plot, as does the story's thematic concern with Barbox's birthday: one in a string of unique, repetitive, inescapable events.<sup>6</sup>

The critical focus on the serial novel, which Dickens helped to make so popular, has tended to eclipse interest in his contribution to annual publishing as a practice. Hughes and Lund argue that the serial was the characteristic form of the nineteenth-century because of the way it spoke to ingrained assumptions and ideologies of modern capitalism and culture, including delayed gratification, personal growth, and a sense of time as a constantly unfolding sequence, reinforced by new work and discoveries in the fields of, for example, geology, archaeology, and history.<sup>7</sup> Many of the contributions to the Christmas Numbers want to tell stories that are adapted to the ongoing mode, but as I have shown, stories about courtship and marriage are more often than not ruptured by calamity. The association of the short piece with modern, periodical publishing, and the relatively faster pace of modern life, may also be the reason that very few of the Christmas Number stories are set in the historical past; rather, the majority recount the personal experience of the teller, and some work up to the present moment of storytelling, which adds to a sense of community and contemporaneity with contemporary readers.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See Zemka, *Time and the Moment*, 103.

<sup>7</sup> Hughes and Lund, *The Victorian Serial*, 4–5.

<sup>8</sup> William Moy Thomas's "Somebody's Story" (*RS*), Gaskell's "The Squire's Story" (*ARS*), and Adelaide Anne Procter's "The Seventh Poor Traveller" (*SPT*), are all set in the historic past. On the notion of retrospection in narrative, see Robert Patten, "Serialised retrospection in *The Pickwick Papers*," in *Literature in the*

From racing hours which seem to “trea[d] on each other’s heels,” to the “sudden pause” in the pulse of the city, like “putting cotton in the ears,” when you turn off the Strand towards the river, time in Dickens’s fiction often seems to be doing strange things, particularly for a man who traded on regularity and strict deadlines.<sup>9</sup> Time is a broad subject in Dickens scholarship, from Bodenheimer on the way the pressure of memory elides the space between past and present, to Matt Bevis’s recent account of the temporality of Dickens’s style itself, and the way it resists onward plotting; from James Marlowe on Dickens’s ambivalent fictional “uses” of the past, present, and future, to Sue Zemka on the narrative pacing of Dickens’s “peripatetic” novels.<sup>10</sup> A recent collection of essays, edited by Trish Ferguson, emphasises the extent and variety of temporal concern during the period, and the way that various authors engaged with these concerns in their work.<sup>11</sup> The acute time-consciousness of the “Barbox Brothers” stories means that they richly repay the closely calibrated approach that measures their compulsive syntactic ticks and tocks, and the larger temporal systems of memory and industrial modernity which produced them.

The “Barbox Brothers” stories provide a particularly concentrated exploration of a topic that continues to garner interest from scholars of Dickens’s

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*Marketplace*, ed. John O. Jordan and Robert L. Patten (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 124.

<sup>9</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 446; Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, 555.

<sup>10</sup> Bodenheimer, *Knowing Dickens*, 59; Matthew Bevis, “Dickens by the Clock,” in *Dickens’s Style*, ed. Daniel Tyler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 47; James Marlow, *Charles Dickens: The Uses of Time* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press), 13-14; Zemka, *Time and the Moment*, 102-21. See also Garcha on temporality, the sketch, and class, in *From Sketch to Novel*, e.g. 114-15.

<sup>11</sup> Trish Ferguson, ed., *Victorian Time: Technologies, Standardizations, Catastrophes* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

work. But they also draw on the temporality of Christmas publishing, through their focus on the annual event, which has been broadly neglected in the scholarship of Dickens and the period in general.

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Ghosts, premonitions, parallel existences, diaries, and burning fuses counting down to catastrophe: the Christmas Number stories reflect the breadth of the Victorian preoccupation with the self's relation to time, and the short form gave authors scope to experiment. In Procter's contribution to *The Holly-Tree Inn*, the barmaid's poem maps the significant stages of a woman's life against the seasonal changes of the Judas tree. Several years later, Procter was imagining the possibility of a dual existence in "The Ghost in the Picture Room" (*THH*) in which a young nun who had broken her vows returns, destitute and dying, to her old convent, only to meet another version of herself there – "*what she might have been*" (21). The first poem imagines time as subject to the inexorable natural changes of the seasons, whereas the second presents a time that is not rigorously bounded or fated, but radically open to alternate possibilities. Other writers were more drawn to the moment. Charles Collins's "His Black Bag" (*SL*) imagines the possibility of being able to capture and preserve the present moment, which anticipates the technological advances which were to come later in the century: "[i]f sound and thought and action could be photographed – caught in some camera obscura, and retained, what would be the result of the process? . . . Quick! The instrument is set, the slide withdrawn, and the sensitive, and prepared, plate



exposed” (19). His subsequent account is of the conversation around the dinner table:

LORD SNEYD (to Miss Crawcour). I dislike travelling. One has to rough it so. I have an aversion to roughing it. – MISS CRAWCOUR (to Lord Sneyd, coldly). But surely that is the great fun of travelling. – MYSELF (to myself). Effeminate beast that Sneyd is; (to servant, silently protruding stewed pigeons over left shoulder) No, thanks. – LORD SNEYD (to Miss Crawcour). Don’t see any fun in having greasy hot water instead of soup, and beds so damp that you may take a bath in them. These sort of things disturb me, put me out, make me – not angry exactly, I’m never angry – are you? – MISS CRAWCOUR. Yes, often. – LORD SNEYD. Really, now, Miss Crawcour. – BUTLER (over right shoulder). Sherry, sir? – MYSELF. Yes. (19)

The close imbrication of conversation, aside, and stage direction, means that this remarkable scene is like the script of a play, which nevertheless anticipates the intimacy of film, where the camera weaves amongst the characters at eye level. It is the closest textual approximation he can make of the simultaneity of the “wondrous jumble of sound” (19) of the party scene.

One of the most striking uses of time in a Christmas Number story is Wilkie Collins’s “The Ghost in the Cupboard Room” (*THH*).<sup>12</sup> John Burrows has described one of the ways that Victorians imagined their relationship to history was through the “abrupt, spasmodic, in a word catastrophic.”<sup>13</sup> It is a sensational account of the hijack of a ship, in which the only surviving crew member, Nat

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<sup>12</sup> John Bowen calls it one of his “most gripping tales,” in “Collins’s Shorter Fiction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Wilkie Collins*, ed. Jenny Bourne Taylor (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 38.  
doi:<http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.york.ac.uk/10.1017/CCOL0521840384.004>.

<sup>13</sup> John Burrow, “Images of Time: From Carlylean Vulcanism to Sedimentary Gradualism,” in *History, Religion, and Culture: British Intellectual History 1750-1950*, ed. Stefan Collini, Richard Whatmore, and Brian Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 204.

Beaver, is left to “[b]low up with the brig!” (24). Gagged and bound in the ship’s hold, Nat can only watch as a candle, connected by a slow match to a barrel of gunpowder, slowly burns down. The story is set during Simon Bolivar’s wars of independence against Spanish colonial rule in Latin America in the early nineteenth century – “a famous man in his time, though he seems to have dropped out of people’s memories now” (22). Despite the historical backdrop, the line which dominates the story is not the plotline of political revolution, the narrator’s memory “not being very good for dates, names, numbers, places, and such-like” (22). The sense of upheaval and renewal, which might have marked a narrative about revolution, gives way to an obsessive internal marking of the passage of time, as the narrator recounts his experience of facing death.

Collins’s story is an example of the trend Nicholas Daly has described, in which the “time-consciousness” of the age was “recast as pleasurable suspense” in both popular literature and on the stage, often focusing on the railway accident.<sup>14</sup> The description of the burning line of the fuse parallels the reader’s activity of making their way through the lines of print. As Daly suggests, we are enfolded into the temporal experience of the scene. The effect of watching the “slow, murdering flame” (25) is to speed up Nat’s perception of time and increase the significance of the moment. As Mark W. Turner has argued, the perception of time both slowed down and sped up in the nineteenth century, influenced by new technology, such as the railway, and scientific discourses

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<sup>14</sup> Nicholas Daly, *Literature, Technology, and Modernity, 1860-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 49.

which were shedding new light on the age of the earth.<sup>15</sup> Written in 1859, but set decades earlier, the story both evokes and displaces the time-consciousness of the age it was written. It draws on the same anxious clock-watching, the habitual marking of small units of time (which will be seen at the beginning of the “Barbox Brothers” stories) over an extended period. The narrator was “bound hand and foot in half a minute” (23); he uses the word “moment” eight times; he watches his doom draw nearer with “every fresh second of time” (24); he wonders about the “instant” of his death, whether it will be “too sudden” to be painful, perhaps experienced as a momentary “crash” inside or outside himself (25), blowing his body to “atoms” (24). He is saved with only a “thread’s breadth” (26) of the slow match left. Nevertheless, this extremely modern sensibility is focused on an archaic method of timekeeping – the candle – which the clock had displaced. The candle-clock had been used to measure regular intervals of time. Paul Dombey asks a workman who was fixing a clock at Doctor Blimber’s, “a multitude of questions about chimes and clocks,” including “what he thought about King Alfred’s idea of measuring time by the burning of candles; to which the workman replied, that he thought it would be the ruin of the clock trade if it was to come up again.”<sup>16</sup> The precise calculation of time had changed dramatically over the century. As Zemka points out, “[w]hile in the eighteenth century it was a luxury to have a clock with a minute hand, in the 1870s bureaucrats and scientists were troubled by the quarter of a minute it took for an

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<sup>15</sup> Mark W. Turner, “Periodical Time in the Nineteenth Century,” *Media History* 8 (2002): 186.

<sup>16</sup> Dickens, *Dombey and Son*, 217.

electrical signal to traverse Paris.”<sup>17</sup> Like the clock, the candle is a way of spatialising time. Nevertheless, to readers in the late 1850s, Nat’s approximation of how much time he has until the slow match is ignited is frustratingly imprecise and conjures a scenario far from the precision time of the railway:

How much life did that inch leave me? Three-quarters of an hour? Half an hour? Fifty minutes? Twenty minutes? Steady! an inch of tallow candle would burn longer than twenty minutes. An inch of tallow! the notion of a man’s body and soul being kept together by an inch of tallow! Wonderful! Why, the greatest king that sits on a throne can’t keep a man’s body and soul together; and here’s an inch of tallow that can do what the king can’t! (26)

The suspense of Collins’s story is drawn from the tension between archaic technology and modern time-consciousness. Indeed, the “dramatic time limit,” which Daly associates with Collins’s *The Woman in White*, begun in the same year as this story, would later become an essential trope of the suspense plot.<sup>18</sup>

Like the signalman, and like the White Queen of Wonderland who remembers things, indeed experiences things, before they have happened, Collins’s narrator has experienced a kind of temporal reorientation. He knows a catastrophic event is imminent but is powerless to stop it; indeed, the drama is the sense of impending doom, and not the event itself. Instead of life counted upwards from birth (via the anniversary that Barbox is trying to avoid), forward moving in time, life is counted backwards from death. Death is to come but also, by virtue of being inevitable, already paradoxically present; no longer a shadow looming at some indeterminate point in the far future. In her study of shock and

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<sup>17</sup> Zemka, *Time and the Moment*, 5.

<sup>18</sup> Daly, *Literature, Technology, and Modernity*, 49.

the emerging theory of trauma in Victorian fiction, Jill L. Matus argues that it was around the mid-1860s that the idea of a psychic injury began to filter into peoples' consciousness in Britain, encouraged largely by accidents on the railway, and the long-term potential effects of fright and shock.<sup>19</sup> "I am not a scholar myself," Nat explains, "but I make bold to believe that the haunting of any man, with anything under the sun, begins with the frightening of him" (22). As such, Nat is haunted by "nothing more or less than – a bedroom candlestick" (22). Haunting and trauma have important features in common, Matus points out, in that in both experiences, chronological time is ruptured as the past intrudes, with terrifying consequences, upon the present.<sup>20</sup> In the "Barbox Brothers" stories, too, the past overwhelms the subject in the present with the astonishing force of traumatic memory, as shall be seen, and the approaching birthday, rather than marking time's onward march, prompts an ineluctable return to Barbox's earliest experiences.

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The beginnings of stories, like the beginnings of lives, are important. Dickens was perhaps more aware than many of the true significance of early experiences, which was perhaps one of the reasons he returned to the child narrator and

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<sup>19</sup> Jill L. Matus, *Shock, Memory and the Unconscious in Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 86; see also Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialisation of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 138–45.

<sup>20</sup> Matus, *Shock, Memory and the Unconscious*, 98.

storyteller in his Christmas Number stories. The “Barbox Brothers” stories are about, in part, the importance of beginnings, and have a beginning quite unlike any other Christmas Number. The first part opens with a voice issuing from nowhere with a question, as if, having fallen asleep in the very same railway carriage as the unnamed traveller (the title character, Barbox), the reader is jolted awake by the closeness and abruptness of the voice:

“GUARD! What place is this?”

“Mugby Junction, sir.”

“A windy place!”

“Yes, it mostly is, sir.”

“And looks comfortless indeed!”

“Yes, it generally does, sir.”

“Is it a rainy night still?”

“Pours, sir.”

“Open the door. I’ll get out.”

“You’ll have, sir,” said the guard, glistening with drops of wet, and looking at the tearful face of his watch by the light of his lantern as the traveller descended, “three minutes here.” (1)

This is a striking opening – the only Christmas Number to open with dialogue in this way. From the outset, the “Barbox Brothers” stories demonstrate an interest in voice that is quite different from that of Emma Lirriper or the other first-person narrators in general. Tim Cribb, in a rare discussion dedicated to the “Barbox Brothers” portion of *Mugby Junction*, remarks that the dislocated voices call up the dramatic form, “as if this were the opening of *Hamlet*.”<sup>21</sup> But without stage directions to guide, a proscenium arch to frame, a set to locate, or bodies to project those voices on stage, it is less straightforwardly dramatic than perhaps he suggests, and certainly less performative than the monologues of Emma and

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<sup>21</sup> Tim Cribb, “Travelling through Time: Transformations of Narrative from Early to Late Dickens,” *The Yearbook of English Studies* 26 (1996): 81.

company. It doesn't aim for the pathos of the unembellished dialogue between the dying Betty Higden and Lizzie Hexam in *Our Mutual Friend*, but it shares an effect with that brief episode, in which everything except the two voices is muted and expunged, so that they seem to exist together, alone. Indeed, this opening is so arresting in the context of Dickens's Christmas Number stories, that it seems to denote less things that are really happening, and more something taking place on the edge of a dream. Indeed, Barbox is sometimes pictured in states which range from deep thought to trance, or even hallucination.

This kind of sudden interpellation, a voice issuing from an unknown source, occurs a number of times in Dickens's contributions to *Mugby Junction*. One of the most profoundly repetitive passages in the "Barbox Brothers" stories, a dialogue between Barbox and the ghostly voices of his past, begins with a voice, un-introduced and unexplained, which poses the question, "You remember me, Young Jackson?" (3), Young Jackson being Barbox's childhood name. On another occasion, Lamps, one of the Junction's lamplighters, startles Barbox out of a daydream with the question " – Yours, sir?" (2), referring to his luggage, at the same moment Barbox is pondering whether a passing train might be taken to represent the course of his own life. The seeming infiltration of Barbox's thoughts, and the unwitting significance, or as the story puts it, the "chance appropriateness," of the words " – Yours, sir?" is replayed to sinister effect in "The Signalman," where the narrator hails the signalman using the very same words – "Halloa! Below there!" (20) – and gesture as the spectre that had been haunting him.<sup>22</sup> In his own mind, the narrator associates the words "For God's

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<sup>22</sup> On the repetition of phrases, see Helmut Bonheim, "The Principle of Cyclicity in Charles Dickens' 'The Signalman,'" *Anglia* 106 (1988): 380–92.

sake clear the way" (22) with the gesture, which at the end of the story is the exact same gesture and phrase used by the train driver to warn the signalman off the track, before the train strikes him. This moment from the "Barbox Brothers" stories recalls the episode from *Great Expectations* in which Pip awakes in a coach to hear two convicts talking about his "two one pound notes," the very subject he had just been dreaming of.<sup>23</sup> For Peter Brooks, the return of the convicts emphasises "the impossibility of escape from the originating scenarios of childhood" for Pip, and "the condemnation to forever replay them."<sup>24</sup> Similarly, for Barbox, all the world reflects back at him the pain of his early life, which seems destined to be repeated, and which punctuates the present. Indeed, the way these stories undo the boundaries between self and other, past and present, is reinforced in the way motifs and phrases transgress the boundaries between the two stories themselves.

The opening passage evokes and links two of the symbols of the modern age: the clock and the railway. We get a complex sense of time in the opening exchange between Barbox Brothers and the guard. The guard's pronouncement of "three minutes" conjures an era in thrall to precision time and new technologies and builds a sense of imminence and pressure, connected with the strictly regimented train timetable. In his study on the encounter between people and machinery in Victorian literature, Daly points out that anxiety about missing trains became a recognisable medical complaint, as peoples' experiences

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<sup>23</sup> Dickens, *Great Expectations*, 229.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 126.



of time were transformed, in only a few decades, by the railway.<sup>25</sup> This sense of unstoppable time pressure is immediately reinforced by the guard's assertion of "[n]ot a moment to spare," and the mechanical description of the train leaving the station, which anticipates the peremptory instructions you might find on a film script: "[l]amp waved. Signal lights ahead already changing. Shriek from engine. Train gone" (1). The strange mixture of temporalities, both past tense and past imperfect, and with one present participle, denoting both action completed and action in the process of taking place, creates an oddly abstract sequence; one in which human perception is always slightly belated (the lights were "already" changing), and before much is said the train is "gone." The grammar encodes the sense that human cognition was still adjusting to the speed of new technology.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, as with the exchange between Barbox and the guard, where for example the guard uses the phrase "[p]ours, sir," instead of the full "it is pouring, sir," which is inadvertently echoed later by Lamps's question, "– Yours, sir?" language is reduced to the bare elements needed for understanding, as if it too had been infiltrated by the time economy, concision being the linguistic equivalent of the train guard's haste. In the way that time concern enters the language, the "Barbox Brothers" stories both uphold and resist the argument of E. P. Thompson's seminal article "Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism," in which he argues that industrial age workers came to internalise a sense of time-discipline.<sup>27</sup> Barbox mindlessly doubles the time-

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<sup>25</sup> Daly, *Literature, Technology, and Modernity*, 46.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>27</sup> E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism," *Past and Present*, no. 38 (1967): 91.

conscious train guard's motions: "[t]he guard hurried to the luggage van, and the traveller hurried after him. The guard got into it, and the traveller looked into it" (1). Whilst this reads at a first glance as if the subject had merely internalised the time imperatives of the age, such that his compliance with the guard's motions are automatic, it is revealed as Barbox's story unfolds that his submissiveness has as much to do with the circumstances of his upbringing.

The change from dialogue in the opening exchange, through the arrival of the extra-diegetic voice of the narrator, registers yet another kind of temporality; one which points beyond the immediate sphere of activity to a consciousness separate in time and space from the action narrated. The narrated phrase – "said the guard, glistening with drops of wet, and looking at the tearful face of his watch by the light of his lantern as the traveller descended" – feels rich and elaborate in comparison with the stilted repetition of the exchange between Barbox and the guard. With its lilting alliteration (*g*listening, *l*ooking, *t*earful, *l*ight, *l*antern, *t*raveller), it contrasts with the guard's staccato, monosyllabic language, in which the word "sir," repeated no less than nine times in the first twenty lines, crystallises the guard's needful brevity and the class difference between the two men.<sup>28</sup> The narrator's phrase creates a time delay before the temporal marker of "three minutes," which emulates the time taken by the guard to complete the action described. The present participles "glistening" and "looking," and the conjunctive phrase "as the traveller descended," build a sense of simultaneous action, which enfolds the reader into a real-time experience of the exchange. Within this almost filmic passage, the "tearful" watch face is a

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<sup>28</sup> Bonheim, "The Principle of Cyclicity," 391.

conspicuous element; an encapsulation of Barbox's troubled personal history, that the story reveals was as rigorously bounded and proscribed as the train timetable itself. As a symbol it is an extra-temporal figure, pointing towards something yet to come in the narrative, as well as towards the past. But it is also a meta-figure for temporality itself, and an enigmatic one. The watch refers to the impersonality of public time, which is in contrast to the psychic depth indicated by its tearfulness. Indeed, whereas the peremptoriness of the dialogue suggests that it was the quantitative measure of time that was particularly at stake in modern life, the tearful watch points towards the story's greater concern with the self's relation to history and origins, and the way that homogenous, impersonal time is inevitably punctuated and disrupted by the personal energies of individuals.

Just as the "Barbox Brothers" stories begin in a slightly disjunctive way, as if we were indeed part way through a story rather than at the beginning, Barbox is, in his own words, like "an unintelligible book with the earlier chapters all torn out, and thrown away." What, Barbox asks, "can be expected from such a lost beginning?" (9). This is very close to Charles Darnay in *A Tale of Two Cities*, who, having been condemned to death for the crimes of his uncles, tells his wife, "[i]t was the always-vain endeavour to discharge my poor mother's trust, that first brought my fatal presence near you. Good could never come of such evil, a happier end was not in nature to so unhappy a beginning."<sup>29</sup> Steedman has argued that the Victorian texts which stressed the importance of lost childhood in the formation of adult identity, paved the way for the twentieth-century

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<sup>29</sup> Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*, ed. Richard Maxwell (London: Penguin, 2003), 347.

psychoanalytic articulations of the self.<sup>30</sup> The remarkable beginning of the “Barbox Brothers” stories enacts, without explicitly commenting on, the importance of beginnings in the story that is to follow. Indeed, the abruptness of the opening parallels the unceremonious way that Barbox was brought into the world, “unsummoned and unannounced” (2), like a train that doesn’t stop, stealing by in the night. As one might expect in a story so concerned with birth and identity, the figure of the mother is overburdened with significance. The mothers of the story are unable to stop their children from coming to harm. Phoebe’s mother dropped her as a baby, which caused her paralysis and an immobile life, which means she will never bear children of her own, and all but one of Beatrice’s six children died in infancy. The “unsummoned” train that Barbox imagines is like himself appears from an “intangible deep cutting or dark tunnel” (2), an image of birth which anticipates the abject, threatening tunnel in “The Signalman,” with its “barbarous, depressing, and forbidding air,” an “earthy deadly smell” (21), and with “wet stains stealing down the walls and trickling through the arch” (23). The threatening liminality of the signalman’s tunnel, which means haunting, or perhaps madness, and death, is a gothic echo of Barbox’s troubled sense of self, which appears to originate in his “intangible” mother. And without a father, he finds himself under the control of a man who was “like” his father, a man who was “hard enough and cold enough so to have brought up an unacknowledged son,” and who directed him to take over the “Barbox Brothers” business, rather than bequeathed it to him (3). The name of the business refers, significantly, to brothers, to a horizontal line of relation,

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<sup>30</sup> Steedman, *Strange Dislocations*, 4.

rather than to succession as in the name “Dombey and Son.” The fact that he adopts the company name as his own means that his very identity is bound up with a mock sense of belonging and lineage, which began with his illegitimate birth and his first name, Young Jackson, which cruelly emphasises that he is a “son” to nobody, and that there is no “Old” counterpart to give the name meaning, which is described as a “sadly satirical misnomer for Old Jackson” (4).

The beginning phase of life was difficult in the nineteenth century, as the well-documented child mortality rates show.<sup>31</sup> In the Christmas Number stories, the deaths of children interrupt the successive family timeline, as they do in many of Dickens’s novels. Gaskell’s ghost story “The Old Nurse’s Story” (*RS*) concerns two sisters, Maud and Grace, who both fall in love with their music teacher. The family unit is twice devastated in the story: once when Maud’s husband, whom she married in secret, abandons her; and second when Maud’s father discovers the marriage and turns her and her child out into the snow, where they both freeze to death. Indeed, in most of the Christmas Number stories that focus on the relationship between adult siblings, one of them dies.<sup>32</sup> The ghosts of Maud, her daughter, and her father, haunt the house where her spinster sister Grace continues to live until finally, Grace is stricken with paralysis and takes to her deathbed repeating the phrase, “what is done in youth can never be undone in age!” (20). The interconnected motifs of freezing to

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<sup>31</sup> Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 120.

<sup>32</sup> See Gaskell’s “The Old Nurse’s Story” (*RS*), Griffiths’s “The Mother’s Story” (*RS*), Lynn’s “The Old Lady’s Story” (*ARS*) and “The Sixth Poor Traveller” (*SPT*), and Procter’s “Three Evenings in the House” (*THH*). An exception is Sala’s “Over the Way’s Story” (*ARS*).

death, paralysis, and spinsterhood, point towards the untimely cessation of the family line.

Where children die in Dickens's Christmas Number stories – primarily Lucy in *The Wreck of the Golden Mary* and Sophy in *Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions* – the bereaved parents replace their lost children, naturally or by adoption, in order to fulfill the family narrative. The “Barbox Brothers” stories, too, move towards a domestic resolution, in which Barbox reunites Polly with her mother, Beatrice, the implication being that unlike her unfortunate siblings, she will thrive. Yet the story is never fully subsumed into conventional domestic ideology: Barbox remains a bachelor and Phoebe a spinster. Indeed, Phoebe's satisfying and productive single life seems to reimagine the embittered, cynical spinsterhood that Dickens depicted in Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations*. Phoebe's “fanciful appearance of lying among clouds” on her white couch, in her “very clean white room” (6), displaces the dark confines of Satis House, and the decaying tatters of Miss Havisham's once-white bridal clothes, which were “faded and yellow”; and instead of Miss Havisham's rotting wedding cake, Phoebe proudly reports that her female friends are always ready to give her a piece of their cakes, so that she may follow the old tradition of putting it under her pillow (9).<sup>33</sup> Ultimately, neither the image of the reunited family, nor the description of the elective kinship group that finally ties Barbox and Phoebe to Polly and her family, can absorb the strange and unsettling force of the story's portrayal of Barbox's bad beginning, nor the force of this exceptional opening.

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<sup>33</sup> Dickens, *Great Expectations*, 58.

Storylines, family lines, and railway lines: the notion of straightforward temporal or spatial progression from beginning to end, from parent to child, or from place to place, cannot be taken for granted in the “Barbox Brothers” stories, nor can the separation of human plots and mechanical tracks.<sup>34</sup> The “hard-lined” (3) woman, from whom Barbox receives his early education (presumably in an orphanage, or foundling institution), displaces the family line; indeed, the hardness and rigidity of her character, implied by the phrase, both sets the conditions which lead Barbox to make this journey, and approximates the structure – the hard, steel lines – which make that journey possible.<sup>35</sup> The mechanics and structures of the railway system were an expedient analogy for those who were trying to understand and explain the workings of the human mind, for example, the connection between thoughts, and the operations of memory.<sup>36</sup> For Barbox, the shuddering of heavy metal machinery embodies a particular way of thinking about time and selfhood:

Here, mournfully went by, a child who had never had a childhood or known a parent, inseparable from a youth with a bitter sense of his namelessness, coupled to a man the enforced business of whose best years had been distasteful and oppressive, linked to an ungrateful friend, dragging after him a woman once beloved. Attendant, with many a clank and wrench, were lumbering cares, dark meditations,

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<sup>34</sup> On the “line” and narrative, see J. Hillis Miller, *Ariadne’s Thread: Story Lines* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), for example, 17–27.

<sup>35</sup> This phrase is not in the Oxford English Dictionary Online.

<sup>36</sup> See Matus, *Shock, Memory and the Unconscious*, 90–91; and Rick Rylance, *Victorian Psychology and British Culture 1850-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 175.

huge dim disappointments, monotonous years, a long jarring line of the discords of a solitary and unhappy existence. (2)

Emma Lirriper's recollection of visiting the sea with her husband while they were courting gives rise to an association of time with continuous flow and vastness: "to think that it had been rolling ever since and that it was always a rolling and so few of us minding, made me feel quite serious" (7, *Legacy*). Indeed, her perception of time is in keeping with the flow of her narrative style, just as Barbox's characterisation of his history in segments, like connected carriages of a train, or the separate but interdependent journeys listed on a train timetable, is reflected in the division of the first "Barbox Brothers" story into three numbered parts.<sup>37</sup> The "jarring line" analogy suggests that Barbox views his life as a deterministic sequence, in which every miserable event is the necessary result of his "lost beginning" (9); one disappointment "inseparable from," "coupled to," or "linked to" the next.<sup>38</sup> In a famous passage from *Great Expectations* the reader is encouraged to think of the "long chain of iron or gold, of thorns or flowers, that would never have bound you, but for the formation of the first link on one memorable day."<sup>39</sup> Here, the chains and links have become the linkages between carriages, a chain of steel, which begets for Barbox an involuntary association of the speeding train with his own seemingly inexorable course.

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<sup>37</sup> See Daragh Downes, "The Best of Time, The Worst of Time: Temporal Consciousness in Dickens," in *Victorian Time: Technologies, Standardizations, Catastrophes*, ed. Trish Ferguson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 31.

<sup>38</sup> Marlow says Dickens was becoming more attuned to notions of determinism in his later novels, in *The Uses of Time*, 40; see also Mengel, "'The Signalman,'" 271.

<sup>39</sup> Dickens, *Great Expectations*, 72.



The description of Barbox's early life is of a young man unable to exercise his free will. He had come into possession of his business "imperceptibly" and had "insensibly" come to hold a bad reputation with his clients (4). The course of his professional life was decided for him by his "father": "[y]ou showed me which was my wearisome seat in the Galley of Barbox Brothers," and "told me what I was to do, and what to be paid; you told me afterwards, at intervals of years, when I was to sign for the Firm, when I became a partner, when I became the Firm" (3). The words "imperceptibly" and "insensibly" take us once again into the field of belated perception, which calls up the new cognitive demands placed on the passenger by the speed of the railway itself, but also anticipates some of the tenets of modern psychoanalytic theory. Just as the railway lights were "already changing" and the train "gone," self-understanding or even conscious cognition only comes *after* the event, which Wolfgang Schivelbusch and more recently, Matus and Daly have pointed out is true of the railway accident.<sup>40</sup>

Bowen has argued that Dickens's book for Christmas, *The Haunted Man*, reveals the way that Dickens engaged with contemporary psychological theories of memory, and even anticipated some of the questions of modern psychology.<sup>41</sup> The "Barbox Brothers" stories and "The Signalman" waver between psychological, physiological, and supernatural explanations of their central characters' states of mind. Barbox's description of the "jarring line" calls up one of the dominant schools of nineteenth-century thinking on the mind, the theory

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<sup>40</sup> Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*, 137; Matus, *Shock, Memory and the Unconscious*, 84; Daly, *Literature, Technology, and Modernity*, 23.

<sup>41</sup> John Bowen, "Uncanny Gifts, Strange Contagion: Allegory in *The Haunted Man*," in *Contemporary Dickens*, ed. Eileen Gillooly and Deirdre David (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2009), 79, 81.

of associationism, in which as Rick Rylance has shown mental life was considered to be structured by experience, rather than by innate qualities.<sup>42</sup> The train becomes, for Barbox, a metaphor which physically parallels the temporal sequence of significant experiences that have defined his current state of mind. It is also perhaps an apt emblem in the eyes of the Victorian critics of the theory, who held that it reduced the complex workings of the mind to a mere mechanical operation.<sup>43</sup> Bodenheimer states that Dickens had taken in contemporary theories of memory, and that he was captivated by the notion that buried memories might spontaneously surface through association with other ideas, as for example in dreaming states.<sup>44</sup> Within associationist logic, the “intangible” mother looks like a remote memory, buried deep in the recesses of Barbox’s mind, to which all of his subsequent experiences retrospectively lead, but which is inaccessible to the conscious mind. But the “Barbox Brothers” stories also resist the materialist conception of the self. Barbox’s observation that, despite her disability, “perfect cheerfulness, intuitive or acquired, was either the first or second nature” (8) of Phoebe and of her father, Lamps, indicates the story’s interest in innate and hereditary conditions of character. As Rylance has underlined in his study of Victorian psychology, these two stances were to dominate debate about the formation of the mind throughout the period.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Rylance, *Victorian Psychology*, 40.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>44</sup> Bodenheimer, *Knowing Dickens*, 57–58.

<sup>45</sup> Rylance, *Victorian Psychology*, 40.

But Dickens's stories for *Mugby Junction* also go beyond these ideas. Barbox suggests to Phoebe that a "disease" causes him to brood on his past (9), and the narrator of "The Signalman" considers whether the haunting might not merely be the result of a disease of the "delicate nerves" of the signalman's eye (23).<sup>46</sup> A couple of years later, in 1868, Dickens's George Silverman, the troubled narrator of *George Silverman's Explanation*, refers to the "diseased" corner of his mind, that is, the source of his chronic fear of being seen as "worldly."<sup>47</sup> But there are also other, stranger possibilities. Barbox's friend Tresham, who eloped with Beatrice, the only woman Barbox had ever loved, believes that the deaths of all but one of their children is the result of a curse leading back to this betrayal. Even stranger, perhaps, is this suggestion as to how the mean reputation of the firm had passed to Barbox himself:

It was as if the original Barbox had stretched himself down upon the office-floor, and had thither caused to be conveyed Young Jackson in his sleep, and had there effected a metempsychosis and exchange of persons with him. (4)

"Metempsychosis," a term that Leopold Bloom defines for his wife, Molly, in James Joyce's *Ulysses*, is a word used only a few times in Dickens's work.<sup>48</sup> In *A Tale of Two Cities*, a certain Monseigneur, owner of a large house which contained Tellson's Bank, had fled from the trouble in disguise. "A mere beast of the chase flying from hunters, he was still in his metempsychosis no other than

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<sup>46</sup> Graham Tytler suggests that the signalman may be suffering from monomania in "Dickens's 'The Signalman,'" 26-29.

<sup>47</sup> Charles Dickens, "George Silverman's Explanation," in *Charles Dickens: Selected Short Fiction*, ed. Deborah A. Thomas (London: Penguin, 1985), 393-94.

<sup>48</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Declan Kiberd (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), 77.

the same Monseigneur, the preparation of whose chocolate for whose lips had once occupied three strong men besides the cook.”<sup>49</sup> In his opening part for *The Holly-Tree Inn*, Dickens’s narrator recalls a strange fellow guest at a previous inn who, “at that stage of metempsychosis, may have been a sleep-walker, or an enthusiast, or a robber; but, I awoke one night to find him in the dark at my bedside, repeating the Athanasian Creed in a terrific voice” (6). In these examples, Dickens uses metempsychosis to imagine the transformations of identity that might take place within a single lifetime, through disguise, self-reinvention, or even madness. Metempsychosis in Barbox’s story imagines identity as something inextricably linked to the past, something predetermined; a bizarre version of the nature that Phoebe has inherited or learned from her father.

As a version of inheritance and selfhood, metempsychosis connects the question of identity with the strange transferences and the threat to the sovereignty of the individual mind that “The Signalman” plays out, when the signalman asks the narrator if the words of his initial greeting, “Halloa! Below there!” might have been “conveyed” to him in a “supernatural way” (22). But based on Dickens’s previous uses of the term, metempsychosis may also hold the possibility for change. Indeed, Barbox is able to transform by the end of the story, primarily due to Phoebe’s good influence. In these stories, Dickens is clearly thinking about selfhood and free will, and what influence early experiences or innate sensibilities might have on the formation of the adult self. In “His Brown-Paper Parcel,” we can sense the author wondering in a playful way about why we do the things we do, when Mr Click asks the narrator whether his

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<sup>49</sup> Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*, 268.

gloomy disposition is a result of his being “[u]nder a species of star? A kind of malignant spell? A sort of gloomy destiny? A cankerworm pegging away at your vitals in secret . . . ?” (31). Indeed, Polly’s statement to Barbox, “[y]ou must be a simpleton to do things and not know why, mustn’t you?” (13), reflects back, innocently and unwittingly, the complex psychological questions that the “Barbox Brothers” stories explore.

Like parts in a serial, or like successive Christmas Number productions, the carriages of a train are separate and articulated, continuous and discrete. Just as each item of the contributed material is named after a “Branch Line” of the railway, so too are the railway lines themselves like storylines: they crisscross, overlap, and turn on themselves in wonderfully unexpected ways, like the intricate woven web of “extraordinary ground-spiders that spun iron” to which they are likened (4). The railway lines are described as “threads” (7), which connects this structure to the interwoven threads of lace that Phoebe is making on her lace-pillow, which also crisscross and overlap. The cushion is not a figure for narrative, but for other forms of mental process. It is a figure for thought, which Phoebe explains “goes with my thoughts when I think, and it goes with my tunes when I hum any” (8). It is connected with interiority, then, but also with social interaction: “there was a kind of substitute for conversation in the click and play of its pegs” (7). It is creative and enabling; a bridge between thought, speech, and more liminal forms, like humming. All Barbox can muster in return at first is a “knitted brow” (7), wrinkled in disapproval and suspicion. Like the crisscrossed threads, the train that Lamps mentions to Barbox on his first night at Mugby Junction, the same that brings him back to the junction at the end of the story, is the “Up X” (16). “X” recalls the “x” of “Barbox,” and visually manifests the

repressive and restrictive implications of “Bar.” In rhetoric, “X” is the symbol for chiasmus, the structure ABBA, which parallels the structure of a return journey.<sup>50</sup> It also stands visually for a juncture, the junction itself, the crossed threads of Phoebe’s cushion, the crisscross storylines whereby Phoebe and Lamps are brought together with Beatrice and Polly, perhaps even the double-crossing that caused the rift between Barbox and Beatrice in the first place. As much as a railway line is about progression from one point to another, it is also inherently about repeated journeys and returns, in a story that is always threatened by return, and in a publication – which Dickens usually shortened to the “Xmas No.” in his letters – that came back year after year.

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From the level of structure down to syntax, different kinds of repetition characterise the narratives of the “Barbox Brothers” stories: the repetition of words and phrases, densely repetitive passages of narration, repetitive sequences of plot, and a focus on repetitive psychological (and in “The Signalman,” supernatural) experiences. The plot line is not simply troubled by, but characterised by, returns: of painful memories, of estranged friends, of ghosts, of trains. As the narrative moves forward through time, like echoes in an empty railway station in the “deadest and buriedest” (2) time of night, structural and linguistic repetition and the return of the past as memory build a web of

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<sup>50</sup> Miller, *Ariadne’s Thread*, 24.

interconnected meanings that collectively challenge a simple chronological unfolding of plot. Cribb has described the rhetorical strategy of the “Barbox Brothers” stories as Dickens “on the threshold of modernism,” in which the narrative’s “redundant repetition” and “discontinuity” expose the inability of chronological narrative to reproduce the systems of industrial modernity.<sup>51</sup> However, repetition in the “Barbox Brothers” stories is as much about a relationship to the past as to the present. Indeed, the intricate imbrication of the two means that the “Barbox Brothers” stories can be related to contemporary theories of memory and of the self that were still in the process of being formed.

The railway, like the publishing industry, is bound up with the temporality of repetition. Each annual Number repeats and differs from the last, as a singular occasion of an annual event, a type of repetition that enabled progress, for they were bought in greater numbers every year, but also made it vulnerable to copycat publications and a lack of originality. In 1868, writing to Wills, Dickens could think of no ideas for the Number “which would do otherwise than reproduce the old string of old stories in the old inappropriate bungling way, which every other publication imitates to death.”<sup>52</sup> The journey of the three forty-two “Excursion” train that Lamps awaits on Barbox’s first night at the junction, is both the same and different each time, both a part of the controlled schedule of the timetable, and reliant upon its own seemingly independent volition, like an animate creature: “[w]hat lays in her power is sometimes more, and sometimes less; but it’s laid in her power to get up to-night, by George!” (3). The “Excursion,” a specially commissioned train with cheap rates, is a little like

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<sup>51</sup> Cribb, “Travelling through Time,” 86.

<sup>52</sup> Pilgrim, 12:167.

the Christmas Number itself, both inside and outside the regular routine of the system to which it belongs. Indeed, Lamps mispronounces excursion as “Skirmishun” (2), which calls up “skirmish,” an occasion of irregular fighting on the outside of the main conflict – something both inside and outside, both expected and unpredictable.<sup>53</sup>

Barbox is described talking to himself after he alights at Mugby Junction: “[h]e spoke to himself. There was no one else to speak to. Perhaps, though there had been anyone else to speak to, he would have preferred to speak to himself” (1). This chiasmus – “spoke to himself”/“else to speak to”/“else to speak to”/“speak to himself” – creates a sense of something returning to itself, like the train, which moves away only to return again in reverse; or, indeed, like the kind of compulsive behaviour that the sentence describes – the self-isolating habit of the main character. Talking to one’s self, in Barbox’s case, also underlines his uncertain sense of identity. Barbox Brothers and Lamps are referred to by plural, rather than individual, names. Barbox Brothers is a corporate name, which later becomes “Barbox Brothers and Co.” after he re-orientates himself towards a more sociable life, and “Lamps” refers generally to the lamp men working at the junction. Barbox is also referred to in the course of the story as sir, the traveller, Young Jackson, the Gentleman for Nowhere, the Gentleman for Somewhere, and Old Barbox. Despite his many names, Barbox is fixated upon his lack of familial identity, his “namelessness” (2). In an act which points back to this, he chooses not to discover Lamps’s Christian name: “[w]hat signifies your name! Lamps is name enough for me. I like it. It is bright and expressive. What do I want more!” (8). As in allegory, what matters most is that names are expressive of something:

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<sup>53</sup> “skirmish,” entry 1, definition 1, *Oxford English Dictionary*, web, March 2015.



Lamps and Phoebe's names (Phoebe means brightness) associate them figuratively and literally with light, and Barbox's name reflects the restricted conditions of his life. Names are thus both curiously overdetermined, verging on allegory, or insignificant and changeable, which underlines the story's focus on the problem of the construction of selfhood. Like the earlier moment of unintended insight from a child, the passage in which Barbox asks a young child who Phoebe is, to which he responds bluntly that Phoebe "can't be anybobby else but Phoebe. Can she?" (5) is an ironic hint towards the oddly plural identities in this story, and Phoebe's contrastingly secure sense of self.

The characters of the story, including the narrator, repeat themselves and echo each other's language. The first conversation between Barbox and Lamps sees them adopt and moderate each other's phrases. Lamps's statement referring to the Excursion train, "she may be up," is echoed by Barbox's question, "[w]ho may be up?" (2). Barbox's statement "I doubt if I comprehend the arrangement" is returned in Lamps's response as "I doubt if anybody do, sir" (2). The alternating, echoing repetition of Barbox and Lamps's dialogue seems, at first, to be related to the automatic performance of duty associated with the railway. But the linguistic repetition during Barbox's first encounter with Lamps (which includes the repetition of the single words "yes" and "surely"), acquires a different tone as Barbox begins to explore both the junction and the richer possibilities of his newfound freedom. Indeed, the trochaic rhythm of his question "Mugby Junction, Mugby Junction. Where shall I go next?" (4) sounds rather like a fairy-tale incantation, as if the railway lines might respond by helpfully disentangling themselves to reveal the right path. Indeed, whereas verbal repetition indicates simultaneously a feature of the modern condition, a

kind of mechanisation of interpersonal relationships, and the limited scope for self-expression that has characterised Barbox's life, the double invocation of the name "Mugby Junction" calls up a genre in which repetition has the power to invest language with magical force.

The narrator also reuses phrases. Alone on the platform, Barbox exclaims "Mugby Junction! . . . . At past three o'clock of a tempestuous morning! So!" (1) which is repeated by the narrator as "[t]hus, at Mugby Junction, at past three o'clock of a tempestuous morning, the traveller went where the weather drove him" (1). The narrator echoes Barbox, as if to emphasise that as Barbox speaks to himself alone at the junction, the only response would be the echo of his own lonely voice. The narrator's early description of Barbox as a man "who had turned grey too soon, like a neglected fire" (1) is repeated later:

Throughout this dialogue, the traveller spoke to himself at his window in the morning, as he had spoken to himself at the Junction overnight. And as he had then looked in the darkness, a man who had turned grey too soon, like a neglected fire: so he now looked in the sunlight, an ashier grey, like a fire which the brightness of the sun put out. (3)

The linguistic back and forth of narration, "spoke to himself"/"as he had spoken"/"as he had then looked"/"so he now looked," emphasises Barbox's mental state as one caught in constant flux with the past. Barbox is prone to strange, liminal mental states, in which he stares, trancelike at passing trains, or converses with the ghosts of his past. In this passage, his crisis resembles a state between life and death, like a fire on the verge of extinction.<sup>54</sup> As Stephen

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<sup>54</sup> This description recalls Bitzer in Dickens's *Hard Times* who was so pale in colouring that he looked as if "he would bleed white." See *Hard Times*, ed. Paul Schlicke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 5.

Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher have argued in *Practising New Historicism*, writers' interest in figures which inhabit "undead," between states has partly to do with the function of fiction itself, that is, the mental reanimation of characters in the acts of writing and reading; but they also point out that Dickens and his contemporaries were fascinated by the latent potential of suspended states of being, like dreams, hallucinations, or delirium.<sup>55</sup> In these trances, Barbox is associated with ash, which in relation to the Christian festival, calls up the "ashes to ashes" verse, and the imagery both of resurrection and of the continued life of the soul (something already suggested in a different sense in the reference to metempsychosis). The image of the fire is perhaps more intensely invested at Christmas time, when families are imagined gathered together around the hearth. Just as the railway itself comes to life in trails of "[r]ed hot embers" (1) with a passing train, which are shortly "extinguished" (2), leaving it "dead and indistinct," the image of ash contains the possibility that a vital spark might be rekindled.

The description of the railway's coming to life and death, temporarily shifts the perspective of the story from the narrator, to a kind of indirect discourse, in which we see the junction from Barbox's perspective on the platform:

A place replete with shadowy shapes, this Mugby Junction in the black hours of the four-and-twenty. Mysterious goods trains, covered with palls and gliding on like vast weird funerals, conveying themselves guiltily away from the presence of the few lighted lamps, as if their freight had come to a secret and unlawful end. Half miles of coal pursuing in a Detective manner, following when they lead, stopping when they stop, backing when they back. Red hot embers showering out upon the ground, down this dark avenue, and down the other, as

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<sup>55</sup> Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practising New Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 202.

if torturing fires were being raked clear; concurrently, shrieks and groans and grinds invading the ear, as if the tortured were at the height of their suffering. Iron-barred cages full of cattle jangling by midway, the drooping beasts with horns entangled, eyes frozen with terror, and mouths too: at least they have long icicles (or what seem so) hanging from their lips. Unknown languages in the air, conspiring in red, green, and white, characters. An earthquake accompanied with thunder and lightning, going up express to London. Now, all quiet, all rusty, wind and rain in possession, lamps extinguished, Mugby Junction dead and indistinct, with its robe drawn over its head, like Caesar. (1-2)

It is an extraordinary portrait of the machine as not only power and motion, but as an entity on the verge of sentience. The thirteen participles, gliding, conveying, pursuing, following, stopping, backing, showering, invading, jangling, hanging, conspiring, and going, create several effects. They create an aural echo (in which they are joined by the gerundial participles torturing, suffering, and drooping), which propels the reader through the passage, like the clanging of a passing machine. For Cribb, the temporality of the passage represents the train timetable, characterised by regular, ongoing activity.<sup>56</sup> But this account overlooks the important subjective element, the way the passage moves between direct perception of an object to reflection, to encode the fixed perspective of the character who perceives the events; for example, from the apprehension of the “goods trains . . . gliding” to the dark simile which follows, “like vast weird funerals.” Indeed, from the viewpoint of the platform, the activity of the machine never really ends, but merely moves out of view, as the present participles imply. The final sentence begins with the temporal marker “Now,” which evokes the profound and sudden silence and stillness of the moment following a period of intense noise and motion. The image of Caesar completes a series of allusions to

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<sup>56</sup> Cribb, “Travelling through Time,” 84.

death: “palls,” “funerals,” the “secret and unlawful end,” and hell’s “torturing fires.” There is a sense of belatedness and temporal dislocation: the originary moment is a secret death, a beginning which is also an end, in a paragraph which disjunctively begins with the suspicion of a crime, and ends with the image of a corpse.<sup>57</sup> The detective novel, of course, is all about mysterious beginnings and crimes to be solved, and gives a high value to satisfactory resolutions, as does this story about a lost beginning and an uncertain future.<sup>58</sup> The shift in perspective to free indirect discourse can be seen as part of the temporal strangeness of the story. But it is also clear that the notion of perspective, in both its literal and emotional figurations, is significant in this story; one in which the woman who enables the protagonist’s own shift in perspective can only view the junction from her odd recumbent position, “lying on one cheek on the window-sill” (5).

The first “Barbox Brothers” story is structured by several densely repetitive passages:

And then so many of the Lines went such wonderful ways, so crossing and curving among one another, that the eye lost them. And then some of them appeared to start with the fixed intention of going five hundred miles, and all of a sudden gave it up at an insignificant barrier, or turned off into a workshop. And then others, like intoxicated men, went a little way very straight, and surprisingly slued round and came back again. And then others were so chock-full of trucks of coal, others were so blocked with trucks of casks, others were so gorged with trucks of ballast, others were so set apart for wheeled objects like immense iron cotton-reels: while others were so bright and clear, and others were so delivered over to rust and ashes

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<sup>57</sup> Schivelbusch notes that the train compartment became a scene of crime, in *The Railway Journey*, 79.

<sup>58</sup> Vescovi suggests that “The Signalman” shares characteristics of the detective story genre, in “The Bagman, the Signalman and Dickens’s Short Story,” 117.

and idle wheelbarrows out of work, with their legs in the air (looking much like their masters on strike), that there was no beginning, middle, or end, to the bewilderment. (4)

The phrase “and then” is often a temporal marker denoting sequential action, but in this case the narrator is channelling Barbox’s perception of the railway, which is essentially panoramic rather than linear. Whilst the repetition of the phrase might propel the reader forwards through the passage, the phrase is accumulative, linguistically encoding Barbox’s sense of “bewilderment” and his inability to choose a single route. As the lines of the railway are choked with objects, so too the language of the paragraph is thick with sonic echoes, “gorged” on the resonating sounds of the nouns and verbs that describe the scene: the thick sounding chock, blocked, trucks, and rust; or the irony of the “wheeled objects,” whose long vowel sounds create a sense of gliding forwards, only to be undercut by the useless upturned legs of the “wheelbarrow,” surrounded by rust and ash.

The reference to workers on strike calls up the emergence of working-class political consciousness and the politicisation of time that Thompson describes in relation to industrial capitalism. Lamps’s remark that the poet’s work of “asking the stars in a molloncolly manner what they was up to” is a “waste [of] time” (8) suggests that he has internalised a sense of time-discipline that Thompson suggests encouraged workers to value time as a form of currency, something to be spent productively and not wasted.<sup>59</sup> In articles for *Household Words* in 1851 and 1854, Dickens had been sharply critical of the decision to strike by both railway workers and weavers – though generally

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<sup>59</sup> Thompson, “Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism,” 86–87, 89.

positive about the workers themselves.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, in contrast to the image of striking workers as “idle wheelbarrows,” the story extols the virtues of the hard working lower classes. Phoebe describes proudly how “hard-worked” her father is, and that he often works “[f]ourteen, fifteen, eighteen, hours a day. Sometimes twenty-four hours at a time” (8). She also denies that her own role as a schoolteacher can be considered as work, as it is done out of love (8). The final part of the story, “Barbox Brothers and Co.,” paints a romanticised image of the “multitude” of workers in the “great ingenious town” (11), who combine “their many intelligences and forces . . . towards a civilising end” (11). Dickens’s earlier Christmas Number story, “Nobody’s Story” (*ARS*), which provided a scathing critique of the exploitation of workers by the ruling classes, had nevertheless equally emphasised the labourer’s desire to work hard, and his contentment with his social status (34). John Stahl and Ewald Mengel suggest that the signalman is a victim of the alienating conditions of industrial modernity.<sup>61</sup> If so, then “The Signalman” is like a dark shadow, a nightmare alternative, to the image of work in the “Barbox Brothers” stories, which denotes an attitude towards work and time which admires, even advocates, long working hours, and is as dismissive of strikers as it is of starry-eyed poets.

In his description of the “wonderful” intersecting lines of the junction, Barbox fails to make a linear narrative – a “beginning, middle, or end” – of the panorama of the railway, unlike the story Polly teaches him, a romance about a greedy boy who had gorged himself until he burst, which proceeded through

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<sup>60</sup> Schlicke, *Oxford Reader’s Companion*, 298.

<sup>61</sup> John Daniel Stahl, “The Source and Significance of the Revenant in Dickens’s ‘The Signal-Man,’” *Dickens Studies Newsletter* 11 (1980): 101; Mengel, “‘The Signalman,’” 271.

“relishing clause[s]” (12) towards the spectacular and rather resolute ending. The repetition of “others were so” makes a paradoxical sameness of the variety of the railway. Without a conventional narrative order, Barbox is left with an endless horizontal deferral.<sup>62</sup> The railway is a paradox of both progression and stasis, where one line is a “bright,” “clear” vista to the future, the others are blocked, cut off prematurely, in a state of deterioration, or simply ground to a halt as a result of industrial action. It is fitting, in the context of Barbox’s life, in which the name he chooses to assume signifies both restriction and a lateral familial relationship, that the phrase “and then” should merely take him sideways, rather than forwards.

Barbox’s bewilderment at the intersecting mass of railway lines is followed by the eruption of activity in the junction:

Barbox Brothers stood puzzled on the bridge, passing his right hand across the lines on his forehead, which multiplied while he looked down, as if the railway Lines were getting themselves photographed on that sensitive plate. Then, was heard a distant ringing of bells and blowing of whistles. Then, puppet-looking heads of men popped out of boxes in perspective, and popped in again. Then, prodigious wooden razors set up on end, began shaving the atmosphere. Then, several locomotive engines in several directions began to scream and be agitated. Then, along one avenue a train came in. Then, along another two trains appeared that didn’t come in, but stopped without. Then, bits of trains broke off. Then, a struggling horse became involved with them. Then, the locomotives shared the bits of trains, and ran away with the whole. (4)

The paragraph first evokes the technology of the photograph, the creation of a still image, which seems at odds with the frenetic burst of motion that takes over.

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<sup>62</sup> Mussell argues that for Barbox, “repetition is stasis,” in “Part Three: Being Moved.”



Trish Ferguson has suggested that the photograph and the phonograph (the latter of which was perhaps what Emma Lirriper had in mind when she complained about the inability of photographs to call up her husband's voice), were two inventions of the Victorian era which enabled a striking new relationship to time: the ability to keep the past present.<sup>63</sup> The technology of the photograph, then, is perhaps at the junction between the story's portrayal of modernity and the psychological tendency for Barbox's memories to overwhelm the present moment. As the railway makes visible the operations of memory, or the retrospective impression of a life, so the photograph is used to imagine the moment of making a mental impression. In a letter to Wills, Dickens described making a "little fanciful photograph" of the Pit-Country between Durham and Sunderland in his mind, as if it were a "sort of capitally prepared and highly sensitive plate."<sup>64</sup> The description of Barbox is marked with a passiveness that isn't present in this picture of Dickens's active image making. Indeed, the connection between the lines of the railway and of Barbox's forehead, as a figure for his muddled mental state, calls up once again the associationist idea that mental life was defined by the physical environment, but also the critique of that theory, which pointed out the mechanical lack of agency it afforded the human subject.<sup>65</sup>

In contrast to the evocation of the photograph, a frozen image, the repetition of "then" creates the sense of a flurry of activity, and a series of

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<sup>63</sup> See Ferguson's introduction to *Victorian Time*, 11.

<sup>64</sup> Pilgrim, 8:669. Also quoted in Bodenheimer, *Knowing Dickens*, 187.

<sup>65</sup> Rylance, *Victorian Psychology*, 55.

sequential events in time; one which linguistically reasserts Barbox's obsession with beginnings through anaphora (repetition at the beginning of a line).<sup>66</sup> The description of this sudden burst of motion seems, on the one hand, like the actions of a deranged mechanical toy (the "puppet-looking heads"), and on the other, like the spontaneous and unpredictable activity of a wild animal. Human life, as represented in the brooding figure of Barbox, has become less self-determined, and Barbox walks along the platform like a train insensibly running a track: "[t]hus, with a steady step, the traveller went up and down, up and down, up and down, seeking nothing, and finding it" (1). The sense of elective aimlessness conjured by the latter part of the phrase, suggests that Barbox has abandoned the teleology of his journey only to submit to a careless lack of autonomy – "the traveller went where the weather drove him" (1). The locomotives, however, seem to possess the same wild energy and sentience as the horse that had "[become] involved" in their manoeuvres. The thoroughly repetitive passage, propelled by the repeated temporal marker "then," conjures a world that from Barbox's perspective is both thoroughly ordered and completely unpredictable, mechanical and wild.

The plot of "The Signalman" is based on a series of events which are both repetitive and unpredictable. Each visit of the spectre heralds a terrible accident on the line, but the signalman is unable to predict when the spectre will return, or to know when the accident will occur or how to prevent it.<sup>67</sup> The plot of the

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<sup>66</sup> Bowen refers to a remarkable instance of this kind of repetition in *The Haunted Man*, in "Uncanny Gifts, Strange Contagion," 87.

<sup>67</sup> On repetition in the story, see Bonheim, "The Principle of Cyclicity," 380-92; Gary Day, "Figuring out the Signalman: Dickens and the Ghost Story," in *Nineteenth-Century Suspense: From Poe to Conan Doyle*, ed. Clive Bloom et al.

“Barbox Brothers” stories is also extremely repetitive. Barbox goes to Lamps’s room on his first night at the Junction and returns there the next day. On the first day, he twice sees Lamps engaged on business matters. He even receives “his own personal introduction to another Lamps who was not his Lamps” (6). Barbox goes for a walk and, discovering Phoebe’s cottage, ensures that he returns back the same way. Barbox “relished his walk so well, that he repeated it next day” (5) and after making her acquaintance briefly, he “took a walk every day, and always the same walk” (6). Barbox “improved his acquaintance with the Junction” during his first night there, “and again next morning, and again next night and morning: going down to the station, mingling with the people there, looking about him down all the avenues of railway, and beginning to take an interest in the incomings and outgoings of the trains” (6). He takes the seventh line to the “great ingenious town” (11) twice, once to buy Phoebe a gift and the second time at her behest, in remembrance of his good deed, and in the hope that it will bring him back to her. Both “Barbox Brothers” stories are based on an abortive journey; in the first Barbox gives up his ticket to alight at Mugby Junction, and in the second, he abandons a trip to Wales after meeting Beatrice and Polly (whose face is a copy of her mother’s, who herself signals a return of Barbox’s past). The relationship between Phoebe and her father involves him repeating the stories he has heard that day to her, and Lamps is so astonished by the coincidence of Barbox and Phoebe being acquainted without his knowing, that he must take a “rounder” (wipe his brow with his cloth), twice (7). This action recalls the “rounded smears and smudges of stooping velvet

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(Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1988), 40–41; Matus, *Shock, Memory and the Unconscious*, 100.

shoulders" (2) that are imprinted on the wall of Lamps's office room; circular marks which denote the repetitive routine of the Lamp men. Some of these elements receive an echo in "The Signalman": the proximity to the railway, the friendship between two men, the return visit to one of the men's place of work – a small office by the line.<sup>68</sup> As critics have pointed out, the number three dominates the structuring of "The Signalman." Significant elements also revolve around the number three in the "Barbox Brothers" stories, but in a less obvious way. Barbox would have had to wait three minutes at the junction, it was past three o'clock in the morning when he alighted, and not yet three full days since his emancipation. Three is the number of parts that the first "Barbox Brothers" story is split into, the love triangle between Beatrice, Tresham, and himself, and the number of voices he hears from his past.<sup>69</sup>

The act of remembering itself involves the repetition of a pair of questions, which echo, dream-like, in a remarkable triptych of prosopopoeia. The voices issue without invitation, each from a different "quarter" (3) of Barbox's mind.<sup>70</sup> In the first dialogue, he speaks to the mistress of the establishment where he grew up:

"You remember me, Young Jackson?"

"What do I remember if not you? You are my first remembrance. It was you who told me that was my name. It was you who told me that

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<sup>68</sup> See Glancy, "Dickens and Christmas," 71; Tamara S. Wagner, "Dickens's 'Gentleman for Nowhere': Reversing Technological Gothic in the Linkages of *Mugby Junction*," *Dickens Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (2011): 56.

<sup>69</sup> On the structure of the story and the number three, see Bonheim, "The Principle of Cyclicity," 380.

<sup>70</sup> The expression is recalled at the beginning of "The Signalman" when the signalman is unclear of which "quarter" the narrator's voice issues from (20).

on every twentieth of December my life had a penitential anniversary in it called a birthday. I suppose the last communication was truer than the first!"

"What am I like, Young Jackson?"

"You are like a blight all through the year, to me. You hard-lined, thin-lipped, repressive, changeless woman with a wax mask on. You are like the Devil to me; most of all when you teach me religious things, for you make me abhor them." (3)

Barbox's performance of memory is an act which dissolves the boundaries of past and present, self and other, and the differences of age and gender. The word "changeless" presents a double temporal bind. She is changeless *in the past*, with a face as rigid as a "wax mask." But she is also changeless *through time* – preserved in his memory. In contrast, when he meets Beatrice once again, he notices immediately how drastically time has changed her, in comparison with his memory of her: "so had Time spared her under its withholding, that now, seeing how roughly the inexorable hand had struck her, his soul was filled with pity and amazement" (14). To be changeless, like an inanimate mask, posits an unnatural resistance to Time's inexorable hand: a resistance to suffering and change, which are what make us human. The harmful resistance to time is perhaps also present in Barbox's suspended state, between waking and dreaming, delusion and willed performance.

In the sequence of prosopopoeia, memory is not a benevolent force, nor does Barbox wish it to vanish, like the protagonist of *The Haunted Man*. Indeed, this passage seems both like a reckoning with the past and an invasion; something both consciously willed, and passively endured, as if Barbox were held under the spell of the spectres' refrain. It seems to foreshadow modern conceptions of traumatic memory, (which Matus argues are present in "The Signalman"), which intrude into the subject's consciousness as a form of

“reenactment,” for example in flashbacks or hallucinations, rather than mere “recall.”<sup>71</sup> But in his conscious repetition of unhappy feelings and experiences through the act of remembering, Barbox also perhaps foreshadows what Freud would later call the “compulsion to repeat,” where an individual unconsciously wills the repetition of a familiar feeling connected to an experience in the past; rather like the “unwilled, negatively inflected recollections” that, in Bodenheimer’s description, returned to colour Dickens’s own writing.<sup>72</sup> The starkly repetitive language to describe, for example “the deceit of the only woman he had ever loved, and the deceit of the only friend he had ever made” (14), linguistically asserts the drearily unsurprising occurrence of these events, as does the description of his unexpected reunion with Beatrice: “[t]his was the woman he had loved. This was the woman he had lost” (14). The sense of inescapable returns all point towards the event that Barbox is equally helpless to prevent: his birthday.

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According to Benedict Anderson, the date is “the single most important emblem” on the front page of the newspaper.<sup>73</sup> In its place on the top right hand corner of the Christmas Number, it encodes the punctual precision of periodical

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<sup>71</sup> Matus, *Shock, Memory and the Unconscious*, 88.

<sup>72</sup> Bodenheimer, *Knowing Dickens*, 57; Freud refers to the “endless repetition of the same fate” that appears to haunt some individuals, in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” 60; see also Bowen, “Uncanny Gifts,” 81, 87.

<sup>73</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 33.

publication, and relates to an adherence to certain calendrical publishing rhythms (daily, weekly, monthly, and so on).<sup>74</sup> As Beetham suggests, the date “always points beyond itself.”<sup>75</sup> As such, the title and date of the Christmas Number are signs alluding to a very modern kind of temporality, which was characterised by “deadlines, efficiency and precision”: the chain of deadlines working backwards from the publication date, from checking proofs (which is drawn on in *Somebody’s Luggage*) to first drafts; the pressurised work regime of the editor; the synchronicity of an assortment of writers working towards the same deadline; the synchronicity of a community of readers going to buy their copy; and the annual rhythm of these activities.<sup>76</sup> The date that marks the corner of *Mugby Junction* is the 10<sup>th</sup> December 1866. This printed date marks a singularity: that this is the Number for 1866, rather than 1865, for example. But the fact of the Christmas Number being in print underlines that the same text was printed thousands of times and bought and read by thousands of individuals.<sup>77</sup> The other significant date for the “Barbox Brothers” stories is the 20<sup>th</sup> December, his birthday. He reveals to Phoebe that this anniversary is also the reason for his journey:

My first free birthday coming round some five or six weeks hence, I am travelling to put its predecessors far behind me, and to try to crush the day – or, at all events, put it out of my sight – by heaping new objects on it. (9)

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<sup>74</sup> Turner mentions the different rhythms of Victorian print media in “Periodical Time,” 188–90.

<sup>75</sup> Beetham, “Towards a Theory of the Periodical as a Publishing Genre,” 26.

<sup>76</sup> Ferguson, *Victorian Time*, 4.

<sup>77</sup> See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 35.

Bevis has noted that Dickens's work sometimes explicitly resists the action of marking the specificity of the date. The date is quite pointedly given in the "Barbox Brothers" stories, which might have registered with readers as part of the ongoing, calendrical marking of time as practised in the journal. However, Barbox also attempts to resist this inexorable movement forwards in time, and, to borrow a phrase from Bevis, the "mechanistic chains of consequence" it implies, by "heaping" things upon the day;<sup>78</sup> a phrase which strikingly prefigures the notions of repression, avoidance, and denial, that would find expression in modern psychoanalytic theory.<sup>79</sup> In a phrase which can be related to the birthday, Gilles Deleuze has written that festivals are a paradox because "they repeat an 'unrepeatable'. They do not add a second and a third time to the first, but carry the first time to the 'nth' power."<sup>80</sup> Indeed, this formulation seems to speak to the birthday in the "Barbox Brothers" stories, which is most powerfully connected to the past and therefore to identity, rather than to ageing, or even to annual return. Christmas, of course, is a celebration of "the great Birthday," as Dickens writes in "The Road" (36, *SPT*). Indeed, the close temporal connection between the two seems to hold possibility, in the background, that Barbox's birthday might finally become a source of transformative hope, associated with the festival.

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<sup>78</sup> See Bevis, "Dickens by the Clock," 56–57.

<sup>79</sup> Rylance, *Victorian Psychology*, 113.

<sup>80</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, ed. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 1.



For Jacques Derrida, the date “is a specter,” in that it marks “the spectral revenance of that which, as a unique event in the world, will never come again.”<sup>81</sup> Indeed, in the ghost stories found in the Christmas Numbers, and elsewhere, the spectre is often associated with a particular date. In John Oxenford’s “His Umbrella,” the narrator Yorick Zachary Yorke, acquires an umbrella from the ghost of Catherine Crackenbridge on 29<sup>th</sup> February, a special date which only occurs in a leap year. This date has a mysterious aura: indeed, in Dickens’s sketch “Our School,” one of his peers built a reputation at school upon the claim that he was born on the 29<sup>th</sup> February, and had “only one birthday in five years.”<sup>82</sup> Oxenford was perhaps channelling Dickens with his unusual name choices, which almost, but not quite, repeat themselves. The near echo of Yorick/Yorke seems to suggest something returning as something else, like a ghost, or the festival, which can never truly be repeated. Yorick echoes the name of the dead court jester from *Hamlet*, and Parson Yorick, the narrator of Lawrence Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*, also a character in *Tristram Shandy*. It also echoes another of Dickens’s stories, “Please to Leave Your Umbrella” (1858), in which the narrator’s friend is called Yorick, itself an explicit reference to Sterne’s story.<sup>83</sup> The umbrella and its ghostly owner are temporally bound to the strange date, which is both regular and irregular; that is, it seems to

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<sup>81</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Sovereignities in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, ed. Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 18.

<sup>82</sup> Dickens, “Our School,” 39.

<sup>83</sup> Bowen, “Dickens’s Umbrellas,” 40.

belong to an overdetermined, almost arbitrary, sense of temporal order, and to highly idiosyncratic personal experience.

The diary is a link between public and personal time, as a form which is linked, through the date, to public time, but which is never subject to it, as it is filled up with the idiosyncratic experiences of the writer, at intervals of time decided by that writer.<sup>84</sup> In Harriet Parr's ghost story for *A Message from the Sea*, Honor Livingstone commits suicide after being betrayed by her lover James Lawrence. The story is made up of extracts from Lawrence's diary, which describe Honor's living promise to haunt him, and the visitation of her ghost on the same night she committed suicide, 10<sup>th</sup> August, at the same time: "[t]he hall clock had just struck eight, and it was growing dusk: exactly the time of evening, as I well remember, when she came creeping round by the cottage wall" (20). At first James is confident of his vision, denying the possibility of "fancy" or "optical delusions" (20), but after Honor's ghost fails to appear one year, he takes it as proof that it was nothing more than a "subtle emanation of [his] own diseased body and mind" (23), in terms that anticipate the narrator's assessment of the signalman in Dickens's ghost story. James is eventually found dead on the very same spot where Honor had killed herself, on the tenth anniversary of her death. As a form of writing, the diary is marked by its own kind of ghostliness. The spaces between entries embody Honor's paradoxical presence and absence as a ghost. Indeed, to James, the diary is capable of animating the "spectres" (21) of past selves. These entries, then, which are about a ghost are also ghosts in themselves, which temporarily reanimate the voice of the dead diarist.

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<sup>84</sup> Stuart Sherman, *Telling Time: Clocks, Diaries, and English Diurnal Form, 1660-1785* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 107.

Birth and death are intimately connected. In the Reverend James White's story for *The Wreck of the Golden Mary*, a girl who disappears on her birthday reappears as a ghost on the same date the following year. In Wilkie Collins's "The Ostler" (*HTI*), Isaac has a vision on the night of his birthday at 2am, the time he was born, in which a woman tries to murder him, as if to end his life at the very same moment it began. Isaac meets the woman and marries her, only realising her true identity after it is too late. Collins's story ends on an ambivalent note: Isaac leaves his wife, but he can never be truly certain that the threat is gone. A concluding paragraph, however, added by Dickens, reemphasises the continuing significance of the date and time: Isaac will never allow himself to be asleep at 2am and lives in fear of his birthday, in case one day she should catch up with him.<sup>85</sup> In each story that links the date and the ghost, there is a strange convergence between the conventional way of marking time, by the calendar, and something impossible or temporally disjunctive. For Derrida, the calendar itself codifies the inevitable and impossible return of the singular, as does any marking of the date. For Barbox, his approaching birthday means reckoning with ghosts: with the inevitable and necessary return of the date, and therefore of the past.

The "Barbox Brothers" stories work up until the chime of midnight, which ushers in Barbox's first "free" birthday:

He had at length got back to his hotel room, and was standing before his fire refreshing himself with a glass of hot drink which he had stood upon the chimney-piece, when he heard the town clocks striking, and, referring to his watch, found the evening to have so

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<sup>85</sup> Glancy identifies the concluding passage as by Dickens, in Dickens, *The Christmas Stories*, 106–7; see also brief discussion of this short story in Bowen, "Collins's Shorter Fiction," 47–48.

slipped away, that they were striking twelve. As he put up his watch again, his eyes met those of his reflection in the chimney glass.

“Why it’s your birthday already,” he said smiling. “You are looking very well. I wish you many happy returns of the day.” (16)

The end of Barbox’s story, like the beginning, focuses on a timepiece.<sup>86</sup> The striking of the clock marks the anniversary – the birthday – but also something new. Barbox had “never before bestowed that wish upon himself” (16). “Many happy returns” is a banal phrase in many ways, uttered often automatically or out of politeness, but by the end of the “Barbox Brothers” stories, and all the unwelcome returns they describe, it has become charged with significance far greater than its common meaning. However, it would not be a case of many happy returns for the Christmas Number. The following year Dickens collaborated with Wilkie Collins on *No Thoroughfare*, and then, in autumn of 1868, this notice appeared in *All the Year Round*:

The Extra Christmas Number has now been so extensively, and regularly, and often imitated, that it is in very great danger of becoming tiresome. I have therefore resolved (though I cannot add, willingly) to abolish it, at the highest tide of its success.<sup>87</sup>

After eighteen years, tired of inventing framing narratives, tired of the lack of cohesion between stories, tired of dealing with other authors and having his own work “swamped” by them, tired of his many imitators, but still reluctant, he laid this particular ghost to rest.

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<sup>86</sup> Matthew Bevis refers to the “temporal bookends” of *A Christmas Carol* in “Dickens by the Clock,” 50.

<sup>87</sup> Charles Dickens, “New Series of *All the Year Round*,” *All the Year Round*, no. 491 (September 19, 1868), 337.

## Conclusion

This thesis has been about the multiple voices that make up the Victorian periodical, and about Dickens as a special writer within that context: one whose voice rang out from the page, even within the practice of anonymous publishing, rather than being “swamped” by the voices of other authors, as he had feared.<sup>1</sup> The reader of Dickens’s Christmas Number stories is confronted with the ways his short fictions both speak to and exceed his longer work. They are drawn to some of the recurrent concerns of the novels, like memory, money, and childhood, and to minor figures, like the waiter and the landlady, who in these short stories take centre stage. But they are also a unique collection of texts, in the context of Dickens’s career. They are powerful and innovative experiments with voice and form; they contain metanarrative elements about the periodical and about collaboration; and they play explicitly with the idea of autobiography and revelation. But because of critical prejudice in favour of the serial novel, the richness and quantity of Dickens’s longer work, and perhaps the increased recent critical interest in Dickens’s early career, sketches, and journalism, these stories have not been discussed in the detail they deserve. Indeed I suggest that they are one of the most important and overlooked bodies of fiction in the second half of the nineteenth century; not only important to revealing the whole scope of Dickens’s career, but also to the history of the Victorian periodical and the development of the short story.

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<sup>1</sup> Pilgrim, 12:212.

I have sought to demonstrate the richness and complexity of these short pieces through chapters that offer close readings of individual stories. *Somebody's Luggage*, the subject of the first chapter, is a Christmas Number about Christmas Numbers. Through Christopher the waiter and Somebody, Dickens comically plays with models of authorship that were under debate in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Dickens very rarely focused on writers in his fiction, and the figure of the writer is almost entirely absent from the Christmas Number stories in general, which makes Christopher's narrative particularly valuable to scholars of Dickens, and within the wider Christmas Number oeuvre. Somebody is a mysterious unnamed figure, who is completely subsumed by his calling to the point that he becomes, finally, indistinguishable from his own inky manuscript. Christopher, however, who is drawn to authorship for the financial return, performs authorship with the same affected dignity associated with his day job as a Head Waiter. Jennifer Wicke has shown that the coffee-room was an important site for the birth of modern urban advertising, a fact which reinforces the connection between the way the advertising scheme for *Somebody's Luggage* anticipates Christopher's feelings of guilt and dread at the prospect of Somebody's return, which in turn reimagines, as I have argued, Dickens's own feelings at the prospect of returning to the Christmas Number each year.<sup>3</sup> But the coffee-room also has a significant context in Dickens's biography, for it recalls his description to Forster of sitting in a particular coffee-room during his breaks from Warren's Blacking factory where he worked as a child, and where he could

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<sup>2</sup> Salmon, *The Formation of the Victorian Literary Profession*, 102–34.

<sup>3</sup> Wicke, *Advertising Fictions*, 23–24.

read the words “COFFEE-ROOM” backwards, on a pane of glass that faced the street.<sup>4</sup> Chesterton has famously discussed this passage as an example of Dickens’s “elfish kind of realism” in which “the most fantastic thing of all is often the precise fact,” but the striking connection to *Somebody’s Luggage*, which is set entirely in a coffee-room, and which includes an account of Christopher as a working child, has been overlooked.<sup>5</sup> With this in mind, the coffee-room itself may have been connected, for Dickens, with the notion of personal revelation. Indeed, Christopher’s “biographical experience of one that is a Waiter in the sixty-first year of his age” (1) plays with the idea of revealing the secrets of domestic life, secrets that he claims have the power to destroy the careers of their keepers, written at a time when Dickens was allegedly harbouring a scandalous domestic secret of his own, in his relationship with Ellen Ternan.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, Christopher’s encounter with Somebody is a comic and melodramatic account of the way that publication itself can be a dangerous form of self-revelation. Contrary to the notion of what an author might reveal about himself through getting into “Per-rint” (48), Christopher’s narrative also gives a humorous account of the office of editor, through acts of staged censorship, in which some of Christopher’s phrases (for example, compliments to the editor himself) are “editorially struck out” (45). This offers a playful and self-aware new entry point to the discussion of Dickens’s character as editor, which has often

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<sup>4</sup> Forster, *Life*, 1873, 1:37.

<sup>5</sup> Chesterton, *Charles Dickens*, 34.

<sup>6</sup> See Bowen’s article, “Bebelle and ‘His Boots,’” 197-208.

placed a rather negative emphasis on his inflexibility, his desire for control, and the consequent frustration of his contributors.<sup>7</sup>

Dickens's child narrators, which appear at the beginning and at the end of the life of the Christmas Number (in 1852, 1853, and 1866), are perhaps the most significant overlooked formal element of Dickens's Christmas Number stories. The fact that both Martineau and Procter also chose to use a child narrator or speaker, reinforces the position of Dickens's Christmas Number as a publication which could be exploited in interesting ways by authors, and not as a mere commercial venture which aimed to provide the public with much-desired reading material at this time of year. The critical neglect of these narrators is surprising, given the volume of scholarly work dedicated to Dickens's child characters; but it is typical, Marah Gubar has recently argued, of the treatment of the Victorian child narrator in general.<sup>8</sup> The three examples I have focused on demonstrate the remarkably varied nature of Dickens's use of the technique. The first, "The Child's Story," modulates gently between childish and mature expressive modes to tell a story about loss, and about the power of memory to cancel that loss. Dickens inhabits a child's voice and perspective in this case to reaffirm the consoling principle that not only are the dead recoverable to us through memory, but also that our past selves are never truly lost either. By the following year, Dickens shifted the focus of the child's narrative from family to school, and the narrating voice had become both more distinctive and comic. "The Schoolboy's Story" shares with *Tom Brown's Schooldays* a deep concern

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<sup>7</sup> See Gregory, *Life and Work*, 192; Schor, *Scheherazade in the Marketplace*, 91–93; Nayder, *Unequal Partners*, 19; see also Michie, *Outside the Pale*, 85.

<sup>8</sup> Gubar, *Artful Dodgers*, 39.



with schoolboy codes of honour and with the exercise of power. But whereas the latter is told from the perspective of an adult narrator, a former pupil at Rugby, Dickens's story uses the child narrator on this occasion to play with the limitations of the young narrator's understanding. The story, therefore, is not only about school, but also about class, and about the quality of youthful knowledge, which hovers on the cusp of understanding, just as the Schoolboy himself is in a liminal state between childhood and adulthood, and between home and public life.<sup>9</sup>

Dickens's first two child narrators, the Child and the Schoolboy, are integral to a full understanding of the development of this technique in the Victorian period, which is connected both to the century's seminal psychological portrayals of childhood, in texts like Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and *David Copperfield*, but also to emerging forms of children's literature, like the school story. Dickens's final Christmas Number child narrator, however, exceeds any conventional category in the study of this form. The Boy at Mugby is by far the most exuberant and complex of his child narrators, as his narrative blurs the boundaries between genres, between high and low culture, and between writing and speech. The story was inspired by a real encounter with a boy at Rugby station; but as a portrayal of a working child, which draws upon the language of politics and of parliamentary rhetoric, it also incorporates and transforms Dickens's experiences in more complex ways. The Boy at Mugby's narrative is energised by his marginal perspective, as child and subordinate; indeed, his view from above and below, peeking through cracks and making himself almost invisible among the crowd, gives his narrative its particularly vivacious comic

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<sup>9</sup> Lyon Clarke, *Regendering the School Story*, 7.

and impertinent force. But he is both marginal and centre stage: both like the court reporter, watching and describing the action from the reporter's gallery, and like a child performer, who is not transcribing but rather impersonating the voices and characters he has been witness to. The sense of the theatrical and parliamentary spectacle is worked out through the Boy's emphasis on looking, which is also coined in mythical terms, as the rebellious women who work at the junction call up the basilisk and Medusa with their threatening glances.

The comedy of the story is rooted in a sense of carnivalesque reversal and upheaval: the Boy throws off the conventional associations of his low social status by appropriating elements of high culture into his language, and the women refuse to perform the expected routine of deference and helpfulness associated with their position, class, and sex. Together, they make it their mission to thwart the appetites of the passengers who pass through Mugby Junction, in what seems to be Dickens's monstrously comic approximation of a women's political movement; one which rejects the association of the season with generosity and feasting, pictured so famously at the end of *A Christmas Carol*. As such, the Boy's narrative can be read, in part, as a late and humorous echo of Dickens's most enduring Christmas story; one in which the prospect of a roast turkey is replaced with "sawdust sangwiches" (17), and the feeble but emotive energy of Tiny Tim is exchanged for the vigour and comic impertinence of the Boy.

Like the child narrator, Dickens only used a female narrator a few times in his career. Emma Lirriper, a landlady of a London lodging-house, is the only one of Dickens's Christmas Number narrators to appear in two issues. As chapter 3 has shown, in the Christmas Number stories and in other writing of the time, the

inn and lodging-house were often associated with supernatural gothic horrors, or with murder and crime, the latter two of which were largely reinforced by contemporary newspaper reports.<sup>10</sup> The landlady was, broadly speaking, a figure of ridicule and animosity, associated with verbosity and nosiness. In the *Lirriper* stories, Dickens both calls up and undermines these ideas. At a glance, Emma's speech evokes a long tradition of garrulous female speech, which stretches back to Shakespeare. But her speech goes much further than this, as Dickens presents the world through Emma's eye-view. Down to the level of grammar, Emma's language encapsulates her experience as a landlady: the performance of gentility, the lodgers who abscond without paying their rent, and the insecurity of ownership in a world where things are routinely stolen, or fall under the sharp and watchful eye of the taxman. The way that the narrative changes course to incorporate seemingly tangential observations and anecdotes, rather than follow a single narrative line, captures the *Lirriper* stories' concern with relationships that fall outside conventional biological, linear, connections, like the platonic partnership between Emma and the Major, and their joint adoption of the orphan Jemmy.<sup>11</sup> Through Emma's relationship to the socially marginalised young women who work for her, such as Caroline, who is arrested at the lodgings and imprisoned for assaulting a lodger, or Sophy, who has been neglected as a child, Dickens repositions this widely denigrated figure and place as something much closer to his own philanthropic project, Urania Cottage, a

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<sup>10</sup> See pages 140-42 of this thesis.

<sup>11</sup> Furneaux, *Queer Dickens: Erotics, Families, Masculinities*, 63-64.

refuge for young women who have taken to crime or prostitution.<sup>12</sup> But the lodging-house setting also reimagines the Christmas Number itself; a space that is open to strangers (or anonymous contributors), presided over by a benevolent host, whose voice treads the boundaries of (public) speech and (private) thought, just as the lodging-house itself blurs the divide between the private home and public space.<sup>13</sup>

The significance of annual publishing in Dickens's career has been overlooked in favour of the serial novel. The "Barbox Brothers" stories of *Mugby Junction*, focus on a character who is trying to forget his birthday, an annual event like the Christmas Number, which Dickens often approached with a sense of reluctance, or even dread, as my discussion of Christopher and the "A.Y.R." proofs in chapter 1 has shown. In Christmas Number stories by other authors, the annual event is most commonly associated with death and haunting. Indeed, it is almost as if the sense of anticipation associated with the annual publication receives a dark echo in these stories, which goes beyond the prosaic regularity of the weekly issue to a more heavily anticipated sense of return, one which carries the whole weight of the preceding year. The "Barbox Brothers" stories are deeply time-conscious, and the temporality of the railway seeps into the language: from chiasmic phrases which evoke a train's journey back and forth along the line, to chains of present participles which create the sense of a rush of motion and energy, to the repetitive plot line which mirrors the monotony and regularity of the railway regime. Indeed, the stories are an experiment with repetition, from

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<sup>12</sup> Hartley, *Charles Dickens and the House of Fallen Women*, 13–14.

<sup>13</sup> On the connection between the roles of landlord and author, see Douglas-Fairhurst, *Becoming Dickens*, 133; and Patten, *Charles Dickens and "Boz,"* 45–46.

the level of plot and structure, down to the nuanced minutiae of phrasing and grammar. But the stories also contain one of the most remarkable portrayals of memory of Dickens's entire career. Indeed, the railway becomes a way of thinking not only about narrative, but also about selfhood and the relation to the past; and the stories speak strongly not only to contemporary theories of the mind, but also to modern formulations of repression, trauma, and compulsion.<sup>14</sup> But the stories balance these psychological questions with elements of the fairy-tale: with symbolic names, anthropomorphic trains, and the redemptive transformation of Barbox from resentment to a final act of forgiveness, and the symbolic lifting of a curse.

In seeking to demonstrate the rich potential of these stories, this thesis has aimed not to produce a definitive, exhaustive account, or achieve critical closure, but rather to open up the discussion of the Christmas Numbers to the same level of critical scrutiny afforded to the novels. Beetham has suggested that the periodical form is itself "open-ended and resistant to closure."<sup>15</sup> As such, the critical work which seeks to both explain and appreciate it might benefit from being open to a sense of the form's own resistance to neat and tidy endings.<sup>16</sup> Whilst the narrative frames for the most part work towards satisfying conclusions, however unconventional some of these domestic scenes might be, this is not the case for all of them. *Tom Tiddler's Ground* and *The Seven Poor*

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<sup>14</sup> See Rylance, *Victorian Psychology*, on associationism (55–56) and on the railway as metaphor (175); see also chapter 3 of Matus, *Shock, Memory and the Unconscious*, on "The Signalman" and theories of trauma.

<sup>15</sup> Beetham, "Towards a Theory of the Periodical as a Publishing Genre," 26.

<sup>16</sup> Klimasewski refers to the "messy" endings of the contributed stories for *The Wreck of the Golden Mary*, in "Rebuilding Charles Dickens's *Wreck*," 824.

*Travellers* are more ambivalent: in the former, the hermit “took not the smallest heed of the appeal addressed to him” to rejoin society (47), and the narrator of the latter makes a point of noting that he never saw any of the travellers again. Furthermore, many of the stories that these framing narratives contain end with mysteries left unexplained, with lives ruined, or in the expectation of some horrible future calamity. At the end of Percy Fitzgerald’s story about Will Wichelo (*WGM*), Will disappears having murdered his love rival with his blacksmith’s hammer. The narrator of Eliza Lynn’s “The Sixth Poor Traveller” (*SPT*) has been wandering ever since she escaped from her husband, a murderer, “expecting every moment to meet him face to face”; “haunted” by “the fear of his return” (34). Wilkie Collins’s “The Ostler” (*HTI*) ends at the climax of the narrative: Isaac’s wife disappears after attempting to murder him, as he had foreseen she would in a dream. Similarly, at the end of Amelia B. Edwards’s ghost stories, “How the Third Floor Knew the Potteries” (*Lodgings*), after the ghost of George Barnard reveals the location of a burnt pile of bones, there is not enough evidence to convict or clear Louis Laroche, his rival, who later disappears (40). In Parr’s “The Poor Pensioner” (*HTI*) Hester’s son is hung for a crime that he resolutely claimed he didn’t commit. As a result, Hester is driven mad, and Dickens’s introduction to the story describes her wandering the corridors of the inn, looking forward to the day when her son’s innocence will finally be proven, muttering the phrase “I am more patient than death: I am more patient than injustice” (31). These open-ended stories create a form of the “pleasurable suspense” that Daly associated with sensation fiction, but they also create a

sense of ongoing action, of contemporaneity with their original readers, much like the form of the periodical itself.<sup>17</sup>

I would like to end, then, by looking ahead to a small number of the many projects, large and small, that could spring in future from this rich collection of material. Useful studies could be written on the different ways that authors exploited the potential of the first-person narrator, and on the ways that the Christmas Number stories may have contributed to the development of the modern short story. A study of Dickens's prominent female contributors including Gaskell, Martineau, Linton, and Procter, whose work innovated with form and focused, amongst other things, on sexuality, nationality, and female solidarity and betrayal, would be a valuable contribution to the understanding of Victorian print culture and gender, but also of Dickens's working relationships with women. A collected scholarly edition of selected Christmas Number stories by Dickens and other authors would strike a balance between acknowledging the nature of the original publishing conditions, and emphasising, through selection, the individual quality of the stories.

The project is already well underway of bringing the whole range of Dickens's work into critical focus, in order to appreciate the ways in which he operated within, and helped shape, the world of Victorian literature, and to better understand the multiple influences that the broader scene of Victorian print might have brought to bear on his writing. Nevertheless, his Christmas Number stories, which are integral to our understanding of the ways he engaged with and contributed to the periodical, and his experiments with the short form,

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<sup>17</sup> Daly, *Literature, Technology, and Modernity*, 49.

are still hovering at the margins of this widening focus. Indeed, it is partly their very sense of their own marginality, the struggles of their protagonists for money or respectability, for example, and the ways in which they transform this marginality into a form of power through the act of narration, that makes these stories and characters so integral to Dickens's work.



## Appendix

### Christmas Numbers Index

Over 130 short texts make up the *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* Christmas Numbers. Early in my research, I created a table that enabled me to swiftly navigate the material. The *Dickens Journals Online* project is extremely useful in that each published article or story is given “genre” and “subject” information. I adopted a similar method based on my own readings of the stories. Each individual entry included the author’s details, a few purposefully selected key words, and a brief synopsis.

The table included here is a revised version of the original, which includes details for the Christmas Number stories that have not been written about or described in this thesis. For stories that I have used, I have indicated a page number. The number of contributions of each individual contributor, including Dickens himself, is given in brackets alongside their first entry in the table.

As the aim has been to catalogue the individual contributions of Dickens and his many contributors, *The Perils of Certain English Prisoners* and *No Thoroughfare*, the only two Numbers to be written by Dickens and Wilkie Collins alone, are not included in this table.

Story title	Author	Key words	Description
<b><i>A Christmas Tree</i> (published 21 December 1850)</b>			
A Christmas Tree	Charles Dickens (43)	Childhood; Christmas; memory; childhood literature.	Finding himself alone after a Christmas celebration, the narrator casts his mind back to the Christmases of his childhood and youth. The opening of the narrative deals with his childhood fixation upon inanimate things: the “horrible” and unpredictable springing frog, for instance, or the deathlike frozen animation of the grinning mask, which haunted him. The narrator eagerly remembers the books and stories of his youth, from the fairy tales (particularly <i>Arabian Nights</i> ), to schoolbooks, to the innumerable ghost stories which he treats with a mixture of enjoyment and scepticism. At the end of the narrative, the speaker connects the celebration with its Christian origins, and the “law of love and kindness, mercy and compassion” he feels it ought to inspire.
Christmas in Lodgings	William Blanchard (1) Jerrold and William Henry Wills (2)	Christmas; hospitality; the recluse.	p. 155.
Christmas in the Navy	James Hannay (1)	The military; Christmas traditions; class.	Written as a first-hand account recalling Christmas spent aboard the Bustard battle-ship, including how the different classes of men aboard the ship come together on Christmas Day, the meal, and their dreams of home.
A Christmas Pudding	Charles Knight (1)	Food; colonialism and commerce; dream.	In the kitchen, where the Christmas pudding is cooking, a man falls to dreaming about the mercantile and social history of each of the pudding ingredients and their production (including raisins from Spain, nutmeg from the Dutch colonies in Indonesia, and sugar from the West Indies). In this semi-polemical piece, the author represents the pudding in the dreaming man’s vision as a symbol of Britain’s commercial eminence, and of the success of contested policies, in particular, free trade.

Christmas among the London Poor and Sick	Frederick Knight Hunt (1)	The workhouse/ hospital; alcoholism; poverty; periodical essay.	The author gives a brief journalistic account of people who rely on their parish for Christmas dinner, either in the workhouse or in hospital. The focus of the piece is the negative effects of festive over-eating and drinking. The author gives the example of St Bartholomew's hospital, where the surgeon on duty on Boxing Day can expect double the normal number of admissions due to fighting and intoxication.
Christmas in India	Joachim Heyward Siddons (1)	Christianity; colonialism; periodical essay.	The author begins by eagerly praising the work of generations of missionaries who have spread Christianity across India. The author goes on to describe the way Christmas traditions have been adapted and are celebrated in the areas where Europeans have settled, by both European and native families.
Christmas in the Frozen Regions	Dr Robert McCormick (1) and Charles Dickens	Captain John Franklin; exploration; national identity; periodical essay.	The story describes that Englishmen – including those on the famous Captain Parry and Captain Franklin expeditions – have kept up the tradition of Christmas cheer even in the remotest frozen parts of the globe. The narrator gives his account of Christmas and New Year 1841 with the south polar expedition, on the famous exploration ships HMS “Terror” and “Erebus.” It ends with a message of hope that the Franklin expedition, still missing upon the same two ships, may yet return safely.
Christmas Day in the Bush	Samuel Sidney (4)	Australia; hospitality; marriage; adventure.	The story describes two young Englishmen who spend Christmas in the bush in the heat of the Australian summer. Lonely and hungry, even thinking of the jobs they could be doing in England, they ride to their nearest neighbour – another Englishman who had left Devon a beggar and a social outcast – to join in their Christmas festivities. To their delight, the family are preparing a feast, including a Christmas pudding in a copper pan. One of the men falls for and marries his neighbour's daughter, and settles in the bush.
Household Christmas Carols	R. H. Horne (3)	Children; disability; music.	A series of carols dedicated to children: “The Lame Child's Carol,” “The Deaf Child's Carol,” “The Deformed Child's Carol,” “The Deaf

			and Dumb Child's Carol," "The Blind Child's Carol," "The Sick Child's Carol," and "The Healthy Child's Carol."
<b><i>What Christmas Is, As We Grow Older (the words 'Christmas, 1851' are given instead of a date)</i></b>			
What Christmas Is, As We Grow Older	Charles Dickens	Memory; Christmas; death.	An unidentified narrative voice looks back on the "bright visionary" Christmases imagined in youth, in which the objects of affection were won, rivals befriended, or great deeds celebrated, and urges the reader not to shut out these old hopes and dreams from memory. Nothing, the narrator insists, should be shut out from the Christmas fireside, in particular, the remembrance of all those who have died, for those memories are of the time and all its "comforting and peaceful reassurances."
What Christmas Is To a Bunch of People	R. H. Horne	Family life; Christmas traditions; periodical essay.	The narrator describes what Christmas is to each member of a fictional family. The father thinks about his Christmas bills but is not worried about paying them and is comforted that he has put money aside; the mother worries about how the bills for the butcher, the baker, and the dressmaker, are mounting up. The narrator also describes the specific cares of the other family members, but also the household servants, including the housekeeper, and local figures, including the beadle and the grocer.
An Idyl for Christmas Indoors	Edmund Ollier (2)	Nature; the seasons.	This poem describes the dark, cold winter weather, the cycle of the seasons, and festive cheer, and is split into subsections dedicated to the spirits of the holly bush, the laurel, and the mistletoe.
What Christmas Is in Country Places	Harriet Martineau (2)	Christmas traditions; rural life; periodical essay.	The speaker argues that to see true English Christmas traditions we must look to the countryside. The speaker describes the long and arduous preparation that goes into creating the Christmas feast, including the elaborate goose pie, and the specific tasks of the cook, the woodmen, the postman, and other local figures. The speaker also describes the traditions and superstitions surrounding new year.

<p>What Christmas Is in the Company of John Doe</p>	<p>George A. Sala (5)</p>	<p>Debt and debtors; prison.</p>	<p>The narrator's comic account begins with a list of some of his worst Christmases, including those spent at a horrible hotel in Constantinople, aboard a ship, at a dismal boarding school, but also in Whitecross Prison, where he was imprisoned on Christmas Eve for debt. He describes how miserable the Christmas decorations looked wound round the Whitecross gas-pipes, how unpleasant the Christmas meal when not eaten "free." He also describes the appearances and misdemeanours of his fellow prisoners. The next morning, he is set free by a friend, and he spends New Year with a pretty cousin whom he marries. [This account contains the colloquial word "Christmassy" (11), which precedes the examples listed in the OED Online, the earliest of which is 1882].</p>
<p>The Orphan's Dream of Christmas</p>	<p>Eliza Griffiths (2)</p>	<p>Poverty; childhood; death; Christianity; narrative poem.</p>	<p>This poem describes an orphan girl on Christmas Eve, who remembers, with sadness, her early Christmases with her parents and twin brother, before they sunk into poverty, and died one by one. Having nowhere to turn except the workhouse, the poem implies that to die would be a more merciful fate than to face a life of poverty and loneliness. The final stanzas describe her prayer to be reunited with her family, her vision of them, and finally that she spent Christmas Day in heaven.</p>
<p>What Christmas Is After a Long Absence</p>	<p>Samuel Sidney</p>	<p>Colonial adventure; Australia; class in Britain.</p>	<p>The narrator, an orphan, had left England for Australia 16 years earlier and made a life for himself in a newly settled area of the Australian bush. But at Christmas his thoughts wandered back to England. The settlement was a success and he along with it, and he had earned what he needed to return to England for Christmas and surprise his relatives. On returning, he evokes the idealised image of rural England as a "garden," but finds the city nightmarish, and is disheartened by the patent poverty and want. He is disgusted when his driver, an old acquaintance, asks him for money, and wishes himself back in Australia. He ends by describing that he will be accompanied back by many of his</p>

			relations, and that the entrenched class divisions of English society mean he will never return.
What Christmas Is if you Outgrow It	Theodore Buckley (1)	Education; debt; snobbery; family life; grown-up child; moral tale.	Horace's father had sent him to university, where he begins to get into debt. Alongside this, his new social standing makes him haughty, disdainful of his family home and old associates, and fixated upon money and social position. The narrator warns that to outgrow Christmas is a bad sign indeed.
The Round Game of the Christmas Bowl	R. H. Horne	Family game accompanied by verses.	A game in which each player casts their particular "pride" into the bowl, accompanied by some verses.
<b><i>A Round of Stories by the Christmas Fire (published 18 December 1852)</i></b>			
The Poor Relation's Story	Charles Dickens	Fantasy; poverty; erotic triangle; inheritance; gothic.	p. 140.
The Child's Story	Charles Dickens	Memory; allegory; ageing; family; child narrator.	pp. 82-93.
Somebody's Story	William Moy Thomas (1)	Marriage; folk story; bildungsroman.	Set in Southern Germany several hundred years in the past, Caril, an apprentice Tun maker, must go on a three-year journey to earn the right, and the money, to marry. Eventually he earns all the money he needs, and hides it in the hollow body of a mallet he makes for the purpose, to protect it from thieves. However, the mallet is accidentally lost in the river on his journey home. He returns despondent and is shunned by the father of the girl he loves. His hopes of being wed are saved when his lost mallet washes up, which both returns his lost money, and solves the age-old riddle of the origins of the river Klar, which runs through his hometown, for which the Town Council have offered a reward.
The Old Nurse's Story	Elizabeth Gaskell (6)	Ghost story; erotic rivalry; sisterhood; revenge; family.	pp. 175, 205-6.

The Host's Story	Edmund Ollier	Crime; hospitality; narrative poem.	This poem tells the story of a greedy travelling merchant, who is shown hospitality by the generous lord of a little village who welcomes him into his home. The merchant decides to rob his host and to burn down the house to cover his escape. However, the family awake before the fire can consume the whole house, and his attempt to gather too much treasure is his undoing. He must leap out of a window and abandon his stolen booty to preserve his life.
The Grandfather's Story	Reverend James White (2)	Crime; poverty; charity; melodrama.	A highwayman robs two bank clerks, whilst they are out making deliveries. They follow the suspect back to his home, planning to reprimand him. When they see the miserable room he returns to, and his young pretty wife, who refuses to spend the money until he can prove that he got it by honest means, they are made to think of the story of the nativity. Instead of arresting him, they promise to lend him some more money, so that he and his wife may go to America.
The Charwoman's Story	Edmund Saul Dixon (2)	Ghost story	A cook in an Alderman's home describes that her friend Thomas, the coachman, had heard the Alderman's distinctive footsteps on a night when he was known to be away. Thomas wakes her to tell her that he is sure the Alderman is dead and that he has just heard his ghost. A messenger delivers the official news of their master's death the following morning.
The Deaf Playmate's Story	Harriet Martineau	Disability; isolation; child narrator.	pp. 77, 95, 104.
The Guest's Story	Samuel Sidney	Deception; the stranger/foreigner.	p. 145.
The Mother's Story	Eliza Griffiths	Racial discrimination; motherhood; narrative poem.	p. 175.

<b><i>Another Round of Stories by the Christmas Fire (published 19 December 1853)</i></b>			
The Schoolboy's Story	Charles Dickens	School; class; allegory; child narrator.	pp. 94-109.
The Old Lady's Story	Eliza Lynn (2)	Forbidden desire; sisterhood; gothic.	pp. 145, 178-9.
Over The Way's Story	George A. Sala	Crime; debt; family; fairytale.	Barnard Braddlescroggs is a wealthy and cruel London merchant. Jack Simcox, a clerk and an irresponsible drunkard, has three daughters – the youngest and plainest, Bessy, is his favourite. When he goes missing after payday, she wanders in the pouring rain to find him, and catches a dangerous fever. Simcox secretly takes money from work to pay for her care, but is discovered. In exchange for not prosecuting him, Braddlescroggs makes a deal; that Bessy should work for him as housekeeper for 2 years, only visiting her family every 6 weeks, to which Simcox is forced to agree to avoid prison. Bessy works hard and eventually Braddlescroggs softens, and she marries his son.
The Angel's Story	Adelaide Anne Procter (7)	The child; death; consolation; narrative poem.	The poem describes a young boy from a wealthy family who lies dying, watched over by his mother. A child angel hovers, invisible, over his bed. Once he dies, this angel guides him away. The child angel tells the boy a story about a poor child who was once shown kindness by the child of a wealthy family. He reassures the boy that all kindness, good deeds, and all tender feelings continue and take on a divine existence in heaven. The final lines of the poem reveal that they were the two children of the angel's story.
The Squire's Story	Elizabeth Gaskell	Crime; deception; the stranger; melodrama.	p. 145.
Uncle George's Story	Edmund Saul Dixon and William H. Wills	Erotic rivalry; rescue.	The narrator, George, recounts that the night before his wedding, as he walked home alone along the coast, the ground collapsed beneath him and he fell into a hidden underground cave. Unable to rescue himself, he became frantic and wild at the thought of



			his own drawn out death, and at the thought of his father and fiancé. Richard, his old love rival, who uses the cave for smuggling brandy, eventually rescues him.
The Colonel's Story	Samuel Sidney	Gender; greed; marital breakdown; murder.	pp. 142-3.
The Scholar's Story	Elizabeth Gaskell and her husband (1)	Erotic rivalry; marital breakdown; murder; folklore; narrative poem.	Based on French folklore, this poem tells of an erotic triangle. After a woman rejects her husband's cousin, while her husband, a Count, is away at war, the spurned man is determined to turn his cousin against her. When all of his attempts to sabotage the relationship fails, he murders the couple's child, placing the blame on the mother. Grief drives the Count mad, and he murders both his wife and cousin.
Nobody's Story	Charles Dickens	Social injustice; class; representation; education; polemic.	p. 223.
<b><i>The Seven Poor Travellers (published 14 December 1854)</i></b>			
The First	Charles Dickens	Hospitality; friendship; desire; the military; marriage.	pp. 175-6.
The Second Poor Traveller	George A. Sala	Greed; dream; racial stereotype.	Acon-Virlaz is a Jewish shop owner, with an admirable collection of jewellery. His friend and creditor Mr Ben-Daoud joins him in his shop, and tells him that he is going to "Sky Fair" to buy cheap jems – a place he has never heard of, which Ben-Daoud says happens only once every hundred years. On the journey, Acon-Virlaz begins to feel strangely light and airy, and the road and hedges, and horse and cart, melt away beneath him, and he finds himself floating into Sky Fair. He rushes to fill his pockets with huge oversized jewels. When a bell rings, and he discovers that he has ten minutes to get out or he will be turned to stone for one hundred years, he panics, and attempts to run for the entrance without losing any of his spoils. He is shut inside, but he bribes a

			gatekeeper to let him out. As he escapes, he awakes in his living room, where his wife and daughter tell him he had fallen asleep after returning from the inn, considerably worse for wear.
The Third Poor Traveller	Adelaide Anne Procter	Orphan; motherhood; marriage; child speaker.	pp. 77, 97.
The Fourth Poor Traveller	Wilkie Collins (14)	Blackmail; family secret; melodrama.	The narrator, despite his shabby appearance, was formerly a lawyer. He tells his listeners of the case of an old client, Frank, who had fallen in love with a governess. However, a man who has a letter written by Frank's prospective father-in-law, which proves that he committed fraud, is blackmailing Frank for £500. The narrator meets the blackmailer, and, considering him a low blackguard, contrives to steal the letter back. By following a series of clues to the hiding place of the letter, the narrator steals it from him, and the couple are able to marry.
The Fifth Poor Traveller	George A. Sala	Children; disability; travel narrative.	The narrator is a traveller in France. He describes the long French roads, then singles out a public house, and describes its decrepitude in great detail. Suddenly, a little eight-year-old boy runs out of the house and up to him. Despite his youth, the narrator remarks that he looks, in his strange attire, at least 37 years old. His sister, who is blind, follows him shortly afterwards. Her beauty and the perfect symmetry of her face remind the narrator of something from a painting. They tell him about their father, a violent drunk. He buys them some gingerbread before going on his way.
The Sixth Poor Traveller	Eliza Lynn	Marital breakdown; murder; sisterhood.	pp. 175, 246.
The Seventh Poor Traveller	Adelaide Anne Procter	War; folklore; loyalty; narrative poem.	This poem tells the story of a woman who lived approximately 300 years ago, in Bregenz, Austria. She fled her hometown to look for work in the Swiss Valleys. Though she was gone for many years, she would sing the songs of Bregenz to her master's children, and returned to her old accent in prayer. When she

			overhears local men talking of war and their plans to take Bregenz – their enemy’s stronghold – she flees to her old home in the night to warn them.
The Road	Charles Dickens	Christmas; hospitality; the stranger; Christianity.	The narrator of the opening part recounts that after hearing all the travellers’ stories, his dreams were haunted by them. The Travellers eat the breakfast he has charitably provided for them, and go their separate ways; he never meets any of them again. He sets out upon his own journey home, and thinks about the Christian messages of hope, love, and eternal life, that the season inspires.
<b><i>The Holly-Tree Inn (published 15 December 1855)</i></b>			
The Guest	Charles Dickens	Erotic rivalry; the inn; gothic; violence; the stranger.	pp. 145-6, 212.
The Ostler	Wilkie Collins	Premonition; marital breakdown; violence; gothic.	pp. 235, 246.
The Boots	Charles Dickens	Childhood; marriage; satire.	The narrator reports the story of Cobbs, the “Boots” at the inn. He had previously been gardener for a wealthy family who had a precocious young son, Harry, who confided in him that he was in love with a girl named Norah. One summer, the same that Cobbs had left his employment as gardener and become the Boots at the inn, Harry ran away from his grandmother’s house with the intention of eloping with Norah, and the young pair come to stay by coincidence at the very inn where the narrator had gone to work. The women at the inn are all charmed by Harry, and Cobbs humours the pair in their intentions, but Norah soon begins to tire of the adventure. Eventually Harry’s parents come to collect him. The narrator ends by repeating Boots’ opinion that it would be a good thing if more young couples on their way to be married were prevented from going through with it.

The Landlord	William Howitt (1)	Colonial adventure; community; family.	A landlord moves his family to Australia, attracted by the financial prospects. When he arrives, the country seems to have ground economically to a halt. Times are hard, but he spends what money he has on buying land. Over time, his patience and perseverance pay off, and his investments make him a wealthy man.
The Barmaid	Adelaide Anne Procter	The seasons; ageing; desire; narrative poem.	p. 192.
The Poor Pensioner	Harriet Parr (3)	Erotic rivalry; the coquette; murder; capital punishment; madness.	p. 246.
The Bill	Charles Dickens	Erotic rivalry; domestic resolution.	The narrator of the first part is met at his inn by his friend Edwin, whom he suspected of betraying him by eloping with the woman that he loved, Angela. Edwin, it turns out, is newly married to Emmeline, Angela's cousin. He is reconciled with his friend, and marries Angela.
<b><i>The Wreck of the Golden Mary</i> (published 6 December 1856)</b>			
Captain Ravender	Charles Dickens	Shipwreck; gender roles; masculinity; the child.	Captain Ravender, a hardworking unmarried middle-aged man, narrates the opening section. He explains that the gold rush in California has been his motivation in making this voyage. He recounts that the boat struck an iceberg and describes the responses of the male and female passengers – particularly, the cowardly Mr Rarx. They are split into two boats, one headed by the Captain, the other by Chief Mate John Steadiman. The only child on board, Lucy, nicknamed the Golden Lucy, becomes a symbol of hope to the stranded men and women. Lucy dies, and the Captain becomes dangerously ill.
John Steadiman	Wilkie Collins	Shipwreck; masculinity.	Steadiman takes over the narration, and charge of the two boats. The Captain is feared very close to death. The survivors relate stories to each other to pass the time and take their minds off the

			dangerous situation they find themselves in.
The Beguilement in the Boats (the Armourer)	Percy Fitzgerald (2)	Erotic rivalry; the coquette; murder.	p. 246.
The Beguilement in the Boats (Poor Dick)	Harriet Parr	Erotic rivalry; death; degeneration.	John Steadiman explains how Dick Tarrant, one of the favourite passengers, came to be on the boat. Dick was put on the boat by his uncle who described him as always getting into mischief. He was in love with his cousin Amy, but she married another. She died within a year of the marriage, which Dick blamed on poor treatment at the hands of her husband. After her death, Dick took to drinking and gambling. After ten years of disgrace and misery, his family offer to pay for him to go abroad and never return.
The Beguilement in the Boats (the Supercargo)	Percy Fitzgerald	Ghost story; legend; revenge; murder.	The narrator tells the legend of Captain Jan Fagel, a smuggler off the coast of the Netherlands. Fagel had a bitter hatred of a local councillor, who had offered a reward to anyone that could take or destroy Fagel's ship. On Christmas night, during a terrible storm, Fagel comes ashore and kidnaps the councillor's wife and child, takes them aboard his ship, and throws them into the sea. He goes overboard himself having caught his foot in a rope. After the narrator has heard the legend, he has a strange dream in which he hears the cry "Yo, yo! Jan Fagel, yo!" After he wakes, he thinks he can still hear the cry above the sound of the wind and waves.
The Beguilement in the Boats (the Old Sailor)	Adelaide Anne Procter	Bigamy; family; narrative poem.	p. 174.
The Beguilement in the Boats (the Scotch boy)	Reverend James White	Ghost story; anniversary.	p. 235.
The Deliverance	Wilkie Collins	Shipwreck; masculinity; domestic resolution.	John Steadiman recounts that the survivors began to get weak: the women lost their energy; the men, their self-control. They spot a ship in the far distance, but as night draws on, they feel

			that all hope of being spotted is lost. Mr Rarx becomes agitated and delirious, and is washed overboard; most of the men on board were so focused on the possibility of catching up with the ship that they made no attempt to save him. Day dawns revealing the ship up ahead of them, and their salvation. After being rescued, Captain Ravender, who exerted all his efforts on behalf of the others, is the slowest to recover. After a brief stop in San Francisco, the Captain and Steadiman sailed back to England.
<b><i>The Perils of Certain English Prisoners, by Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens (published 7 December 1857)</i></b>			
<b><i>A House to Let (published 7 December 1858)</i></b>			
Over the Way	Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens	Family secret; the spinster/ bachelor; female narrator.	The narrator of the framing material is Sophonisba, known as Sarah, an elderly spinster. After her doctor recommended that she have a change of scene, her servant Trottles, an old widower, finds her a place to rent in London, which he reports has the one disadvantage of being situated opposite a House to Let. She moves in, but one day as she is surveying the house opposite, which is supposedly empty, she sees an eye looking back at her from within. She relates that she had always loved children, but that she had never become a mother because her early love was lost at sea, and her brother's child, who was born in India, but who she was going to raise in England, had been still born. She confides in an old friend, Jabez Jarber, who has loved her since their youth and has an ongoing rivalry with Trottle, that she is terribly troubled by the mystery of the house opposite. Jarber promises to bring her information on the house. He reveals that it belongs, by coincidence, to a cousin of Sarah's, George Forley, who she knows to be cruel, and to have renounced a daughter for marrying against his approval. Jarber has a scroll of paper with him, which contains part of the history of the house opposite, which he reads to her [this is the introduction to "The Manchester Marriage"].

The Manchester Marriage	Elizabeth Gaskell	Bigamy; disability; class; crime.	p. 174.
Going into Society	Charles Dickens	Society; the circus; greed; money; satire.	Toby Magsman is a showman, who sets up his circus on the site of the House to Let. Chops the Dwarf was his most lucrative act and, according to Toby, was obsessed with the idea of coming into property. When Chops wins the lottery he decides to go into society, but finds that society rather “goes into” him, taking advantage of his money. His winnings deplete and he returns to the circus, where he dies.
Three Evenings in the House	Adelaide Anne Procter	Siblings; gender; rivalry; narrative poem.	Bertha is devoted to her artist brother, who is nevertheless selfish and proud. Shortly after she turns down a marriage proposal so that she can stay with him, he brings home a wife, Dora, whom she knew nothing about. Dora takes over many of the responsibilities that Bertha had once assumed, to her dismay. However, without his sister’s influence, his art and his health begin to fade. After he dies, Bertha devotes her life to Dora. When her old lover returns, and falls in love with Dora, she doesn’t stand in the way, but she inwardly cries for her brother to be hers again and leaves the house after the couple are married.
Trottle’s Report	Wilkie Collins	Family secret; the child.	Trottle reports that he went to the house to get some direct answers. An old woman answered the door; behind her was her son, Benjamin, who was familiar to Trottle. Her master, Forley, had told her to expect someone to call that day to conduct some business, so the old lady assumes that Trottle is this friend. A noise is heard from upstairs, and the old lady offers to show Trottle to a secret garret room at the top of the house before they settle down to their business. In the room, Trottle sees a diminutive little boy, wrapped in filthy makeshift clothing. He is scrubbing the floor with a blacking brush – his daily game. Trottle pretends that Forley had sent him merely to write a report, and that the proper business would be conducted, with

			payment, on the following Monday. This enables Trottle to make his exit undiscovered.
Let at Last	Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens	Family secret; the orphan; adoption; inheritance.	During the intervening week, Trottle fills in the elements of the story that were still unknown to them, and delivers his report to Sarah. Years before, Trottle had become acquainted with a skilled surgeon called Barsham, a blackguard, who lived with his mother – the very same pair who are the current custodians of the House to Let. Mrs Kirkland, the daughter that Forley had rejected, had been confined while her husband was at sea, and Barsham had attended her, at Forley’s request. Trottle reports that he believes her child, which was reported as still born, is alive and living in the garret in that house opposite. Forley has concealed his existence to prevent him from inheriting any of his wealth. Trottle forces the Barsham’s into a confession, but Forley dies before they can confront him. Sarah buys the house and turns it into a hospital for children. She adopts the orphan boy, who after all is her own relation.
<b><i>The Haunted House</i> (published 13 December 1859)</b>			
The Mortals in the House	Charles Dickens	Haunting; spiritualism; memory; satire.	The narrator is travelling on a train from the North to London with the intention of stopping for a while in the countryside for his health, and had been recommended a particular house to rent by a friend. On the journey he gets talking to the man in his carriage, who claims to be able to see and hear spirits, and that the carriage is full of them now. According to the locals, the house he plans to rent is haunted. Intrigued, he moves in with his unmarried sister and a couple of house staff, who immediately begin to experience strange things. On his sister's suggestion, they get rid of the servants and recruit some friends to come and live in the house to prove that the haunting is nonsense. Nine of them agree to come together on Twelfth Night to tell their stories of what hauntings they had experienced.



The Ghost in the Clock Room	Hesba Stretton (4)	Courtship; the coquette; shame; domestic resolution.	John Herschel says that the spirit that had pervaded their room was only that of his wife, Stella, and that he will tell her story. She had been a careless and flirtatious girl, encouraged by her sister. In her mid-twenties, her sister says she must choose someone at last and marry. She chooses Martin Fraser, who lives next door to her with his father and adopted sister. He becomes her astronomy teacher. This new relationship fills her with shame for her coquettish behaviour. When Martin professes his love, she admits that she had come there as a flirt, rather than to learn, and she leaves the house feeling herself unworthy and false. They are reconciled after Martin's younger sister falls terribly ill.
The Ghost in the Double Room	George A. Sala	Courtship; illness; rejection; judgment.	p. 174-5.
The Ghost in the Picture Room	Adelaide Anne Procter	Religion; desire; disgrace; forgiveness; narrative poem.	p. 192.
The Ghost in the Cupboard Room	Wilkie Collins	Hijack; perception of time; death; sensation.	pp. 193-7.
The Ghost in Master B's Room	Charles Dickens	Dream vision; childhood; school; sexuality; death.	p. 92.
The Ghost in the Garden Room	Elizabeth Gaskell	The grown-up child; debt; crime.	p. 175.
The Ghost in the Corner Room	Charles Dickens	Domestic resolution	The narrator of the first part concludes by reporting that after their stay in the haunted house, his sister and another guest, his old friend Jack Governor were married, and that Belinda Bates (teller of "The Ghost in the Picture Room") and Alfred Starling have since become engaged.
<b><i>A Message from the Sea</i> (published 13 December 1860)</b>			
The Village	Charles Dickens	Adventure story; family secret; shipwreck.	The first part describes the arrival of an experienced sailor, Captain Jorgen, into a little fishing village. He has some

			information for a young fisherman living there, Alfred Raybrock, regarding the death of his brother, who had been lost at sea three years earlier.
The Money	Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins	Adventure story; family secret; crime; shipwreck.	The Captain tells Alfred that he had recently been shipwrecked near an uncharted island. In the reef, he had discovered a message in a bottle, partly destroyed, but clearly signed by Alfred's brother, warning that their inheritance from their father – a sum of £500 – is stolen money. Following the clues in the note, the Captain and Alfred set off for Cornwall to try and discover the truth. Alfred is forced to postpone his marriage to Kitty for the journey and because his father's money, now tainted, was all he had to settle down with. Kitty's father is able to give them a list of names of old sailors from his father's time, who may be able to help.
The Club Night	Charles Dickens	Adventure story; family secret; crime.	They arrive at an inn, where they find a group of old men, telling stories. They join them, hoping that some may turn out to be the men on their list.
John Tredgear's Story	Charles Collins (8)	France; the inn; poison; crime.	pp. 182.
David Polreath's Story	Harriet Parr	Ghost story; betrayal; suicide; revenge; the anniversary.	pp. 234.
Captain Jorgen's Story	Robert Buchanan (1) and H. F. Chorley (2)	Shipwreck; self-sacrifice; cannibalism; narrative poem.	A group of shipwrecked people vote on who is to be eaten, so that the others may survive. A man volunteers, having no one who cares for him. The survivors tell the story of this sacrifice when they are rescued.
Oswald Penrewen's Story	Amelia B. Edwards (5)	Ghost story; travel; marriage.	The narrator's brother had been travelling in Switzerland. He stopped at an inn where he befriended two Italian brothers, and a young Swiss man, Christien, who was selling music boxes. Christien plans to be married when he returns home, so to cut the journey short he decides to travel over the mountains the

			next day. That night, the narrator's brother hears the sound of Christien's music boxes blowing on the wind. So chilling is the experience that he is sure something terrible had befallen Christien. The next day he meets one of the Italian brothers who claims to have had the exact same experience. They agree to travel Christien's route together, where they find his body at the foot of a cliff.
The Seafaring Man	Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins	Adventure story; shipwreck; family secret; crime.	The point of view switches to a lone traveller, who had been asleep upstairs in the inn. He soon recognises the man sharing a room with him as his younger brother Alfred. Hugh had been travelling with Laurence Clissold, a drunkard, who knew their father, having borrowed money from him, describing him as a cruel and harsh creditor. When the ship sinks in bad weather, Hugh and Clissold are the only survivors. They make it to a deserted island, but decide to separate as tensions flare up. However, Hugh manages to discover from Clissold that his father's money was stolen, but no more detail than that. Clissold had also mentioned the name Tragarthen – the name of Kitty's father. After Clissold fails in his attempt to murder Hugh, he sets the island alight. Clissold perishes, but Hugh is captured by a group of natives, who keep him in captivity for a couple of years, he estimates, before he escaped and was rescued.
The Restitution	Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins	Adventure story; family secret; crime; domestic resolution.	The reunited brothers and the Captain return to the village to see Mr Tregarthen and discover the truth. At the time Clissold had borrowed the £500 from Hugh's father, he was working as a clerk in London, alongside Mr Tregarthen. Clissold stole some money, to repay his debt, and laid the blame on Tregarthen, who was ruined. Tregarthen is exonerated, and Alfred is able to marry Kitty. They name their first-born son after the Captain.
<b>Tom Tiddler's Ground (published 12 December 1861)</b>			
Pickingup Soot and Cinders	Charles Dickens	Social isolation;	A Traveller, having heard of Tom Tiddler's Ground, makes his

		travellers; morality.	way to this spot to seek out the infamous man who lives there. Mr Mopes has isolated himself from society and lives in filth and squalor. People come to see him like a curiosity or a tourist attraction. Thinking him aberrant, the Traveller intends to prove to him that his decision to isolate himself is wrong through the stories of other passing travellers.
Picking Up Evening Shadows	Charles Collins	Urban life; the artist; poverty; charity; estranged family.	Mr Broadhead, the narrator, had isolated himself from friends after falling on hard times. He recalls that he was living in a narrow and overcrowded street. He soon realised that he can see the silhouette of the couple living opposite his rooms, when their blind is down and their candle lit. He becomes fascinated by their lives. He sees that they are a young married couple, and that the husband is an engraver. When the husband falls ill, he begins to worry for them, and resolves to give them some money, anonymously, through the doctor, who tells them that the husband's name is Adams. However, the same doctor is also attending the couple's next door neighbour, and he mistakenly gives the money to them. Mr Pycroft, one of Broadhead's friends, also becomes intrigued by the couple after visiting him, and decides to donate some money – without realising that it is all going to the wrong house. They realise the mistake that has been made when they are introduced to Adams and his wife, and they are nothing like they had expected. When they find the real couple, Pycroft discovers that it is his estranged son, whom he disinherited for marrying against his approval. They reconcile and the experience forces Broadhead out of his isolation.
Picking Up Terrible Company	Amelia B. Edwards	France; prison; revenge; murder.	The narrator, Francois Thierry, had been a political prisoner in France, accused of criticising the government. He had been chained to a repeat felon, Gasparo, of whom he had a natural loathing. Gasparo convinces Francois to join him in an escape plot, but during the escape, he knocks Francois to the ground, and leaves him to be captured. Francois manages to escape

			<p>custody again and makes his way to Rome where, by a twist of fate, he is reunited with Gasparo, both of them having been hired to undertake the dangerous task of illuminating St Peter's dome for Easter. Gasparo tries to kill him by burning through the rope by which he is suspended, but in self-defense, Francois causes Gasparo to fall to his death.</p>
Picking up Waifs at Sea	Wilkie Collins	Identity; class; chance.	<p>The narrator was born at sea. On the same journey, a woman other than his mother was giving birth. Both fathers happened to look fairly similar: fair-haired, with blue eyes and a Roman nose. The Stewardess on the boat accidentally mixes up the two babies, and cannot, despite much coaxing, remember which is which. The family backgrounds are quite different. Heavyside is a carpenter, with seven children already. Smallchild is travelling to make his fortune as a sheep farmer, and this is his first child. The Captain is entrusted to make the decision on how this should be dealt with. He decides that the heaviest child should be placed with the heaviest mother. So the narrator, a large baby, went to the Heavyside family. His parents kept having children and his father died in the workhouse, whereas the other family prospered. He remains bitter and unconvinced that he was placed with the right family.</p>
Picking up a Pocket-Book	John Harwood (1)	Adventure story; America; crime; domestic resolution.	<p>The narrator George Walford, was working for a Californian Mercantile Company, Spalding and Hausermann. Spalding, a widower, had a son and a daughter. The son had fallen into bad habits and company, and had been convinced by a bad associate, Joram Heckler, to falsify a cheque for \$30,000, which Heckler has gone to New York to cash. George, who is in love with Spalding's daughter, is tasked with making the dangerous journey across the prairies by horse to New York. With the prize being marriage, George agrees. The group he travels with are attacked by Indians, and one killed, but they help him get to New York. By chance, he and Heckler are staying in the same hotel. When there is a fire</p>

			alarm, George creeps into Heckler's room and recovers the forged documents. He is rewarded as promised: partner in the firm and marriage to Spalding's daughter.
Picking Up Miss Kimmeens	Charles Dickens	School; the child; mental effects of isolation.	p. 94.
Picking up the Tinker	Charles Dickens	Social isolation; morality.	The Traveller, the Tinker, and Miss Kimmeens have been unable, like the other passers by, to change Mr Mopes's mind about his self-imposed isolation. They give him up as a lost cause, and the three of them set off together.
<b><i>Somebody's Luggage</i> (published 4 December 1862)</b>			
His Leaving it Till Called For	Charles Dickens	The author; the Christmas Number; anonymity; the waiter; biography.	See chapter 1.
His Boots	Charles Dickens	France; the orphan; adoption.	p. 37.
His Umbrella	John Oxenford (1)	Ghost story; scepticism; the anniversary.	pp. 38-9, 233.
His Black Bag	Charles Collins	Courtship; erotic rivalry; class; revenge.	See p. 192-3.  Part 1. A group of socialites are staying at the home of a wealthy couple in the countryside. Everyone's focus is on the beautiful Mary Crawcour whom the hostess would like to set up with Lord Sneyd; a marriage that would considerably augment Mary's circumstances. However, the narrator discovers his old friend Jack Fortescue and Mary talking alone together. Afterwards, Jack confesses that he is in love with, but that he has sworn not to pursue her for five years, in which time she may do what she likes and marry another. Despite this, she has sworn she will not marry Sneyd. Fortescue leaves the next day when everyone is out riding. During the ride, Mary suffers a fall, and while on the

			ground she is trampled by Sneyd's horse, which mutilates her face.
His Writing-Desk	Charles Collins	Erotic rivalry; domestic resolution.	Part 2. Some years later, the narrator meets Jack and Mary, who are married, in the Swiss Alps. Much to their surprise, Lord Sneyd is also staying at the same lodge, with his new wife. The narrator is pleased to see how well Mary's face has healed, and her husband adds that he loves the scar, for without it they would not be together.
His Dressing-Case	Arthur Locker (1)	Shipwreck; adventure.	Mr Monkhouse, the narrator, believes himself to be the only survivor of the shipwreck of the Golden Dream, having managed to jump onto an iceberg. Soon enough, however, he discovers his roommate, a man he detests. The narrator cannot help but feel that one of them must end up cannibalising the other. The further they travel on the iceberg, the more survivors they find, until they realise that all the passengers have made a similar escape onto the iceberg. They float towards land and are rescued and put aboard a ship bound for New York.
His Portmanteau	Julia Cecelia Stretton (2)	Dream narrative; fairytale; courtship; identity and performance.	Part 1. Dick Blorage is an easy-going, selfless man. He does a job he hates, in a bank, but is always smiling and cheerful. This fact leads some, especially his ungrateful brother Billy, to take advantage of his better nature. A woman named Ellen had also betrayed him, which has made him worried about women's intentions. On the eve of his housewarming party, he sits alone wishing that people were more truthful. Suddenly, a fairy, calling herself Lady Verita, appears and decrees that whoever sits in a particular chair in his home can only tell the truth. The Fairy's spell works, and his butler and brother both make frank admissions, the latter of having turned up to get money out of him.
His Hat-Box	Julia Cecelia Stretton	Dream narrative; fairytale; courtship;	Part 2. A modest local girl, Gatty Brown, calls to offer to lend something for the party. She sits in the enchanted chair and

		identity and performance; domestic resolution.	admits that the only man she would like to marry is Dick. She leaves the house confused and distressed at her openness, leaving him feeling guilty at having lured her into a confession. During the course of the party, two of his female cousins, whom he had considered as potential brides, reveal their private flaws when seated on the chair. He wakes, realising it had all been a dream, and that the party has not taken place. He invites Gatty to the party where Dick's cousins mock her plain dress. The narration jumps to ten years hence, ending on an image of Gatty and Dick with their children around them.
His Wonderful End	Charles Dickens	The author; the Christmas Number; anonymity; revenge.	See chapter 1.
<b><i>Mrs Lirriper's Lodgings</i> (published 3 December 1863)</b>			
How Mrs Lirriper Carried on the Business	Charles Dickens	The landlady; hospitality; crime; death; adoption.	See chapter 3.
How the First Floor Went to Crowley Castle	Elizabeth Gaskell	Erotic rivalry; France; gender and nationality; murder.	pp. 183-4.
How the Side-Room was Attended by a Doctor	Andrew Halliday (2)	Sociability; the stranger; identity and performance.	A group of young friends have established a Mutual Admiration Society, and as a token of their friendship, decide to buy engraved mugs for each other. A man named Dr Goliath mistakenly stumbles into one of their meetings and interrupts their discussion. After this he begins to attend, but his cynical view of life – his obsession with crime and his disdain for friendship – turns them against each other. Eventually, two of the group members decide to follow Dr Goliath home to find out more about his life. They find him in his lodgings, playing lovingly with his pets, and are assured by the landlady that he is the kindest man that ever lived. His cynical bravado has been



			merely a show to hide his tender emotions.
How the Second Floor Kept a Dog	Edmund Yates (2)	The stranger; judgment; rescue.	John Mortiboy takes a break from work at a seaside inn along with his dog Beppo. The daughters of the landlady think him a rough and brutish man, until he and his dog save their art teacher from drowning, whom one of them is in love with.
How the Third Floor Knew the Potteries	Amelia B. Edwards	Ghost story; erotic rivalry; the coquette; murder.	p. 246.
How the Best Attic was Under a Cloud	Charles Collins	Erotic rivalry; satire.	When Oliver discovers that his sweetheart's cousin is coming to visit he becomes jealous. They hate each other from the start. He writes to a friend about his predicament who turns up on his doorstep the next day, bringing him a pair of pistols so that he might challenge the man to a duel. The challenge is accepted, but the other party, Huffel, pulls out at the last minute, and apologises. Feeling triumphant, Oliver and friends (who had come along for the excitement) go to the pub to celebrate. No sooner have they toasted, than they hear wedding bells pealing close by. Shortly, they see Huffel and his cousin walking past, just married.
How the Parlours Added a Few Words	Charles Dickens	The landlady; child storyteller; school story; fantasy of wealth.	See chapter 3.
<b><i>Mrs Lirriper's Legacy</i> (published 1 December 1864)</b>			
Mrs Lirriper Relates How She Went On, and Went Over	Charles Dickens	The landlady; hospitality; rivalry; France; forgiveness; death.	See chapter 3.
A Past Lodger Relates A Wild	Charles Collins	France; erotic rivalry;	p. 181-2.

Story of a Doctor		suicide.	
Another Past Lodger Relates His Experience as a Poor Relation	Rosa Mulholland (2)	Family; poverty; disability; class; ostracism.	p. 175.
Another Past Lodger Relates What Lot He Drew at Glumper House	Henry Spicer	School; Jewishness and racial stereotypes; wealth; domestic resolution.	pp. 101, 106, 175.
Another Past Lodger Relates His Own Ghost Story	Amelia B. Edwards	Ghost story; skepticism.	A man caught in a snowstorm takes shelter at the house of a reclusive philosopher who had been shunned by friends for his belief in the supernatural. Eager to get home, he leaves the philosopher to catch the mail cart, which his guide tells him had suffered a terrible crash nine years earlier. When in the cart, the traveller slowly realises that his fellow passengers are gaunt and wraithlike, and the mail cart goes off the road in the exact same spot it had crashed years before. He is saved only by falling into a snowdrift.
Another Lodger Relates Certain Passages to her Husband	Hesba Stretton	Erotic rivalry; kidnap; drugging; secret; domestic resolution.	Jane tells the story of her courtship with her clergyman husband, Owen. Owen was engaged to marry Adelaide, but on the eve of their wedding she disappeared. On her deathbed, Owen's aunt, who had always favoured Jane, confesses to kidnapping Adelaide and keeping her prisoner in a secret room, sedating her with laudanum. Adelaide is freed, but Owen declares his love for Jane, and Adelaide eventually marries another.
Mrs Lirriper Relates How Jemmy Topped Up	Charles Dickens	The landlady; child storyteller; death.	See chapter 3.
<b><i>Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions (published 7 December 1865)</i></b>			
To Be Taken Immediately	Charles Dickens	The Cheap Jack; child cruelty; disability; adoption.	pp. 62-63, 66, 160-1, 176-7, 189. 206.
Not To Be Taken at Bed-Time	Rosa Mulholland	Ireland; class; desire;	p. 175.

		madness; gothic.	
To Be Taken at the Dinner-Table	Charles Collins	Authorship; commercial arrangement; anonymity.	p. 39-40, 54-55.
Not To Be Taken For Granted	Hesba Stretton	Debt; erotic rivalry; forced marriage.	Eunice Fielding returns from her German Moravian school to find her home in disarray. Her father has been arrested for debt and Brother More, who had been engaged to marry her sister, claims to have had a divine vision that he would free Eunice's father if she would marry him. Eunice appeals to a wealthy uncle who had agreed to free her father, but only if she agreed to come and live with him, which she rejected. She falls in love with her uncle's lawyer, who begs her not to marry More. Feeling it her duty, and feeling bound by God, she is about to go ahead with the marriage when it is revealed that her uncle has paid the debt, and Brother More is revealed as a fraud.
To Be Taken in Water	Walter Thornbury (1)	Crime; adventure.	The narrator, Herbert, must leave his new wife to go on a dangerous expedition for his work at a bank, delivering a large loan to the Neapolitan King. Herbert must accompany the boxes in travel and ensure their safe arrival. He meets two travelling partners along the way: a Major and a Jewish commercial traveller. Before long, he begins to suspect the Major of trying to rob him, as their journey has been interrupted in several strange ways. The major eventually reveals himself as a detective, who is on the trail of their other companion, who they successfully thwart in his attempt to steal the money. The thief is killed in his attempt to escape.
To Be Taken with a Grain of Salt	Charles Dickens	Ghost story; murder; trial.	The narrator had been unusually affected by the report of a murder in the newspaper. After reading the report, his attention had been drawn to two men in the street, one pursuing the other. They both stop and look at him for enough time that he felt he would recognise them anywhere. He is called for jury duty to the

			murder trial that he had read about. Once in the courtroom he realises that the defendant was the individual he had seen being pursued, and the murdered man was the pursuer. The ghost of this man appears to him in the courtroom and in his chambers. When the defendant is convicted, he stated that he had known he was doomed the moment the jury had entered the courtroom, as on the night he had committed the murder, he had had a vision whilst lying in bed in which he had seen the narrator slip a noose around his neck.
To Be Taken and Tried	Mrs Gascoyne (1)	Erotic rivalry; blackmail; forced marriage; murder.	George Eade and Susan Archer are in love, but Susan's family prefer a wealthy local man, Geoffrey Gibbs. George receives news that Susan has been married in secret, despite his warning that Geoffrey would mistreat her, after which he becomes reclusive and withdrawn. The married couple leave the town for three years, and when they return it is amidst rumours of his terrible treatment of her and their child. On hearing of this, George publicly curses Gibbs and wishes him dead. Shortly afterwards, Gibbs is found murdered, and suspicion falls on George – though he is found not guilty. A year later, a man confesses to the murder to a local vicar, admitting also that he had helped Gibbs to kidnap Susan and blackmail her into marrying him by threatening George's life. The final image of the story is of George returning home to Susan, now his wife, who is cradling their child.
To Be Taken for Life	Charles Dickens	The Cheap Jack; disability; domestic resolution.	Doctor Marigold is warned that a strange young man has been loitering around his cart. He discovers that the young man is deaf, and that he has proposed to Sophy, who has refused him as the marriage would mean going with him to China and leaving her father. Upon discovering her secret, Doctor Marigold urges Sophy to go. She writes to him frequently and in one letter informs him of the birth of her daughter. The final scene describes that Sophy returned to England with her child, who

			was not deaf as Sophy had feared, and who calls out to her grandfather.
<b><i>Mugby Junction</i> (published 10 December 1866)</b>			
Barbox Brothers	Charles Dickens	Memory; trauma; childhood; modernity.	See chapter 4.
Barbox Brothers and Co.	Charles Dickens	Memory; modernity; the child	See chapter 4.
Main Line. The Boy at Mugby	Charles Dickens	Child performer; class; politics; myth.	pp. 65-76.
No. 1 Branch Line. The Signal Man	Charles Dickens	The railway; ghost story; premonition; modernity.	See chapter 4.
No. 2 Branch Line. The Engine Driver	Andrew Halliday	The railway; periodical essay	An engine driver describes his work and the social lives of others in his profession. He speaks particularly about how many people he has seen commit suicide on the railway track.
No. 3 Branch Line. The Compensation House	Charles Collins	The railway; ghost story; erotic rivalry; murder.	Oswald Strange is a sick gentleman who has banned all mirrors from his house. Oswald has described that when he destroys mirrors it is as if under some uncontrollable impulse. His back story is revealed: his wife had fallen in love with her drawing master. In a fit of jealousy and revenge Oswald killed him, but he did so from behind so that his victim only saw him in the mirror. After that he was haunted by the image of his victim in the mirror.
No. 4 Branch Line. The Travelling Post-Office	Hesba Stretton	The railway; crime; the French.	A clerk in the travelling post office tells the story of a woman who had persuaded her way into the carriage when they were carrying some important government post to London. The post is stolen on the journey and he discovers that she had been under the pay of a Frenchman, had lied about her identity, and stolen the government despatch box for him, so that she and her lover Alfred might marry, being otherwise too short of money.
No. 5 Branch Line. The Engineer	Amelia B. Edwards	Erotic rivalry; the	Two lifelong friends, Ben and Mat, fall in love with the same

		coquette; friendship; murder.	woman, who leads them both to believe that she loves them. Eventually, Ben badly injures Mat in a violent rage; he lies between life and death for weeks and it becomes clear that he will never recover. Years after Mat's death, when Ben is working as a train driver in Italy, he discovers that the woman whom he blamed for destroying his friendship is a passenger on board his train. He plans to derail the train, at the risk of killing everybody on board, to be revenged upon the woman. At the last minute, Mat's ghost appeared before him, which prevented him from going through with his plan.
<b><i>No Thoroughfare</i>, by Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens (published 12 December 1867)</b>			

## Abbreviations

*The Letters of Charles Dickens*. Edited by Madeleine House, Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson, et al. The Pilgrim Edition. 12 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965 – 2002. Referred to in footnotes by volume and page number.

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Quotations from the Christmas Number stories, and other articles from *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* (except *Holiday Romance*), have been taken from the facsimile versions made available by the *Dickens Journals Online* project at [www.djo.org.uk](http://www.djo.org.uk). This online resource was prepared using the original printed volumes of Dickens's journals. The Christmas Numbers were included at the end of these volumes. The original pagination of the Number has been given in the text in brackets, and the original publication date, as printed on the Number, has been used. For texts that have been cited or referred to, full references and URLs are given in the bibliography.

It has sometimes been necessary to include an abbreviated title for the Christmas Number issues in brackets, in order to make clear the provenance of the individual contribution being alluded to, and for the sake of a clean text. The following abbreviations have also been used in the Appendix.

### Christmas Numbers of *Household Words*:

<i>ACT</i>	<i>A Christmas Tree</i> (1850)
<i>WCI</i>	<i>What Christmas is, as we Grow Older</i> (1851)
<i>RS</i>	<i>A Round of Stories by the Christmas Fire</i> (1852)
<i>ARS</i>	<i>Another Round of Stories by the Christmas Fire</i> (1853)
<i>SPT</i>	<i>The Seven Poor Travellers</i> (1854)
<i>HTI</i>	<i>The Holly-Tree Inn</i> (1855)
<i>WGM</i>	<i>The Wreck of the Golden Mary</i> (1856)
<i>PCEP</i>	<i>The Perils of Certain English Prisoners</i> (1857)
<i>HTL</i>	<i>A House to Let</i> (1858)

### Christmas Numbers of *All the Year Round*:

<i>THH</i>	<i>The Haunted House</i> (1859)
<i>MFS</i>	<i>A Message from the Sea</i> (1860)
<i>TTG</i>	<i>Tom Tiddler's Ground</i> (1861)
<i>SL</i>	<i>Somebody's Luggage</i> (1862)
<i>(Lodgings)</i>	<i>Mrs Lirriper's Lodgings</i> (1863)
<i>(Legacy)</i>	<i>Mrs Lirriper's Legacy</i> (1864)
<i>DMP</i>	<i>Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions</i> (1865)
<i>MJ</i>	<i>Mugby Junction</i> (1866)
<i>NT</i>	<i>No Thoroughfare</i> (1867)

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